



**YOUNG PEOPLE IN JOBS WITHOUT TRAINING IN
SOUTH WEST ENGLAND**

NOT JUST 'DEAD-END KIDS IN DEAD-END JOBS'

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

Young people in jobs without training (JWT) have been identified as a ‘problem’ group who need encouraging into formal education and training. Following the Leitch Review (2006) and the ensuing policy aim to include all young people in education and training up to the age of 18, it is more important than ever to understand the needs of this group. However, very little is known about their lives, jobs and priorities.

The Research

The research is the first large scale longitudinal qualitative study completed on young people in JWT. It was funded by the European Social Fund, the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions and was conducted by researchers from the University of Exeter in collaboration with Connexions. It was a qualitative longitudinal study involving 182 telephone and face-to-face interviews with 114 young people, aged between 16 and 21 years, who were in jobs without training in the South West of England. This study was participative in approach, including research capacity building with the Connexions PAs who conducted telephone interviews and a participative stakeholder seminar. A quantitative dimension was also provided by an analysis of local and national data.

Conclusions

The deficit category of ‘young person in a job without training’ needs reconceptualising:

- JWT is a very fluid category. 28% of our re-interview group had moved to other jobs, 17% had become NEET and 18% had taken up accredited training.
- JWT covers a diverse range of activities, from building a career to day jobs.
- These young people see themselves as survivors not losers.
- They *are* receiving training. 40% of our re-interview group were now involved in training, which was mostly work related, but only 18% of this was accredited.
- The emphasis on formal training is somewhat misplaced. Only 4% of our re-interview group would consider FE college, 28% would do accredited training in the workplace.
- Their life-paths are not neat trajectories and they resist being pinned down.
- Many feel they are learning useful and credible skills in the workplace.
- Most got their employment via informal contacts and social networks.
- They do have informal skills and interests and sometimes develop them into careers, but mostly they do not have the confidence or encouragement to do this.

- They are often ready to take up training after a few years in employment. The emphasis on 16-19 is too narrow a window for them.

It is also important to acknowledge the structural problems and inequalities they face:

- These young people have had negative experiences of schooling.
- They have work opportunities, but the jobs available to them are mainly low status with little job security and the job market is highly gendered.
- Problems such as lack of transport and housing difficulties restrict opportunities.
- In some cases, they face a range of personal problems related to poverty, family difficulties, accidents and ill-health which make sustaining a job very difficult.
- They are aware that they are positioned negatively in our society and mask and hide themselves when faced with those in authority.
- They value those who take a genuine and holistic interest in them and need support and guidance, but are confused as to where to get it, particularly post 19.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This report focuses on young people in the South West region of England who are employed in jobs without training (JWT). Being 'a young person in JWT' is essentially a policy construct. It has been defined by DfEE (1998) and by Anderson et al for DfES (2006) as being employed for 16 hours a week or over, not being engaged in formal training which leads to a nationally accredited qualification at Level 2 and not having Level 2 qualifications. The policy aim, highlighted in the Government's 14-19 Skills White Paper, is to provide this group of young people with training and educational opportunities to enhance and develop their skills so that they can compete more effectively in the job market. Following the Leitch Review (2006), which emphasised the skills 'deficit' amongst young people and the subsequent proposal (DfES, 2007) that *all* young people should be engaged in education and training up to age 18, it has become even more important to understand the needs and perceptions of those young people currently in JWT.

Anticipating the importance of this issue, the Regional Skills Partnership for South West England (RSP) set up a Steering Group in February 2005 to advise and develop measures that regional partners could take to increase participation in education and training by young people in JWT. Represented on the Steering Group were senior executives from three Connexions partnerships, a representative from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and staff from the School of Education and Lifelong Learning (SELL) and the Skills and Learning Intelligence Module of the South West Observatory (SLIM) at the University of Exeter. SLIM published a report in October 2005, (Evans and Pye, 2007) arising out of their policy and practitioner Learning Theme workshop on the issues around young people in employment without training in the South West. Following on from this, the Steering Group developed the research design and secured funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), LSC and Connexions for a project that aimed to enhance academic and policy-makers' understandings of the ambitions and circumstances of young people in JWT and also to promote improved understanding and practice amongst Connexions' front-line delivery staff.

The project was based within the University and was conducted by three university researchers, with expertise in the field of post-compulsory education. This core research team worked closely with a group of Connexions Personal Advisers (PAs) who represented the six participating Connexions partnerships across the South West of England.

1.2. Context

Whilst young people in JWT are not placed at the bottom of the hierarchy of social and economic concern, like those who are categorised as NEET (not in education, employment or training), they are perceived, nevertheless, as having low levels of functional literacy and numeracy, combined with a deficit of life and vocational skills. Young people in JWT are also hard to reach. Despite an increased emphasis on tracking (Connexions partnerships have to produce regularly updated databases of all the young people that they are in contact with), the DfES acknowledged that young people in JWT ‘may be difficult to contact and identify’ (Anderson et al, 2006: 2. See also DfEE, 1998). Local disparities in the collection of data have exacerbated this problem of identification. Whilst a national registration database would help to ameliorate this and government plans to create such a system have been long-standing, including consultations on the issuing of ‘Unique Learner Numbers’ to adult learners (NIACE, 2004), both funding and organisational challenges remain. Most recently, the announcement that Unique Learner Numbers are to be issued to every school leaver over 14 years, records of which will be permanently stored on a government database, has also led to concerns about the security of the data and civil liberties (Kirkup and Clout, 2008; BBC News online, 2008).

There has been a persistent concern (dating back a century and more) from employers about the shortage of skilled workers in the UK whilst, more recently, the Leitch Review (2006) has highlighted the need to increase levels of functional literacy and numeracy and the general skills level of the population (see also Hayward et al, 2006). Transitions from school to work are a focal point for much of this discussion, but at the same time, there is an ongoing debate about the whole notion of transition and its usefulness as a means of understanding the experiences of young people (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Shildrick and Macdonald, 2007).

In terms of this agenda, young people in JWT represent a future deficit in the adult population, hence the emphasis on developing their generic skills. As Leitch (2006) notes, the proportion of young people staying on in education in the UK is currently below the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average, which is far from the aspiration to benchmark against the upper quartile by 2020 (see OECD 2006; 2007).

One of the Leitch Review’s key recommendations to help tackle the UK’s skills deficit was to extend the opportunities through systemic changes and government incentives for young people to develop their skills, taking advantage of education and workplace training up to the age of 18 years. The Government’s subsequent proposal to increase the participation age to 18 (DfES, 2007) by 2015 has met with a mixed response from the public, media commentators and national organisations. The LSC ‘welcomes and strongly supports’ the proposal (LSC, 2007: 2). Others have voiced disquiet, including the British Youth Council (BYC)¹, which is particularly resistant to the threat of legally-

¹ The British Youth Council represents a coalition of national and regional youth councils of young people up to the age of 26 living in the UK

enforced compulsion to ensure that all 16-18 year olds remain in some form of education and/or training (BYC, 2007). The debate about apprenticeships is also ongoing. The recent publication of the Government's strategy for implementing the Leitch Review also included proposals outlining the expansion of the Apprenticeship scheme for young people up to 25 years (DIUS, 2007). In 2007, the number of Apprentices rose to 250,000 (*ibid*), on the way to achieving the Leitch Review's recommended target of 500,000 by 2020. On the one hand, the Government recognises the importance of apprenticeships, but on the other hand, plans to measure success mainly in terms of formal completions. Drawing upon 'good practice' models of apprenticeship, Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller have argued that the Government's model is restrictive. As they say:

Many employers are providing what we've called expansive apprenticeships. These include a detailed on-the-job training plan, supervision from experienced trainers, regular off-the-job learning with apprentices from other organisations, and the achievement of vocational qualifications that provide a platform for career progression and further study (Unwin and Fuller, 2008: 10).

The Government argues that British workers must be as highly skilled as possible if the economy is to remain competitive at global level, stating 'by 2020 we have committed to joining the world's premier league for skills' (DIUS, 2007: 3), which will require everyone to update their skills and qualifications: 'we need to see every individual across the nation rising up the skills ladder' (*ibid*: 4). Few voices prevail against this dominant discourse. However, Alan Tuckett, Director of NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education), claims that there is a far greater demand for low-skilled, low-paid jobs than is generally assumed (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2007). Department of Trade and Industry figures released in 2007 show that 'there is a shortage of four million people to fill jobs that require no qualifications at all in sectors from service industries to manufacturing' (Nash, 2007: 1).

1.3. Research questions and aims

In framing our research questions we were conscious of the need to meet the varied and various interests of the major stakeholders in the research. The research drew upon the participative methodological approaches previously developed by Quinn and colleagues (2005) with semi-structured interview strategies that have been integral to the work of both Lawy (e.g. 2003) and Quinn (e.g. 2006). Our four key research questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of young people in JWT? How can these be best theorised and understood?
2. What are the interests and enthusiasms of young people in JWT?
3. How can Connexions services best understand and respond to these diverse interests of young people in JWT?

4. At what points in their careers and in what ways are young people in JWT most receptive to moving into learning opportunities?

We sought to frame the four questions in a manner that enabled us to explore and exemplify the iterative relation between policy interests and practices and the interests and concerns of young people. We did not simply want to provide a snapshot, but have sought to provide some sense of the transitional and transformative quality of their lives by incorporating a longitudinal dimension into the research through a series of re-interviews. Notwithstanding this aspiration, we have been aware that the relatively short time-frame for the research, in which we have been able to conduct only two interview sweeps, limited our opportunities to map the transitions of the young people.

We sought to achieve this not only from the perspective of the young people themselves but also from the perspective(s) of policy-makers and other key stakeholders. A third but no less important strand of the project was to build research capacity within the Connexions' sector, by directly involving Personal Advisers (PAs) in the research process.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Methodology

Our methodological approach is that the issues, questions and concerns of young people cannot be easily represented, and indeed are often misrepresented. The skills discourse has tended either to pathologise young people as being feckless and work-shy, or blame their condition upon wider structural forces. For Leitch (2006), however, the problem is presented as one of simply matching skills and need, and of providing young people with appropriate training and education, the corollary being that by raising levels of productivity, levels of poverty and inequality are thereby reduced (Leitch, 2006: 4).

Although there is an emerging body of research concerning young people in the NEET category (e.g. Yates and Payne, 2006; Maguire and Rennison, 2005; Bynner and Parsons, 2002), little has yet been written about the lives and work patterns of young people who are in JWT, particularly from the perspectives of young people themselves. Research on JWT by Anderson et al (2006) is not longitudinal and employs a smaller sample of young people who are only aged 16 or 17. This makes the present research project all the more timely.

The project draws on our previous experience of research with young people: Quinn's (2006) work on provincial working class masculinities, Lawy's (2002a; 2006) work on learning and risk-taking (2002b) and Diment's work with colleagues on vocational habitus (Colley et al, 2003). Fundamental to our approach is the assumption that young people in JWT should not be treated as a separate species from the wider population; rather that their understandings and the meanings that they attach to their actions merit an analysis which recognises the structural, cultural and social conditions which shape their lives.

We felt that the best chance of 'finding' young people was to work alongside Connexions PAs, whose jobs brought them into daily contact with young people, many of whom were in the JWT category. Even so, one of the early problems that we faced was deciding just who to interview. For example, whilst young people who take a 'break' from study for a year between school and college or university are not engaging in Level-2 training/education (the baseline for determining JWT status), we did not wish to over-represent them within the cohort that we interviewed. In order to circumvent this problem, we aimed as much as possible to focus upon young people who had been receiving Connexions advice for more than a year since leaving school. We also sought to represent the diversity of the cohort and whilst we got fairly even gender splits between males and females, ethnic origins were almost wholly white, reflecting the often rural demographic.

A second issue that we were conscious of at the outset of the research was that the construction of the statistics means that the government databases do not represent fully the quality of non-accredited informal training, such as in-house training offered by large

corporate and retail organisations, that many young people receive. Whilst this group are/should be represented in the JWT statistics, they are currently not identified as a subset. The Qualification and Curriculum Authority's Annual review 2006 (QCA, 2007) called for the recognition of employer training schemes under the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The LSC endorsed the call, with the proviso that such training 'should be seen as a component of the Apprenticeship programme' (LSC, 2007: 5).

Most recently, as part of the Government's training and skills reforms, the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, backed the QCA's proposal to allow employers to 'provide in-house diplomas which will be nationally recognised training awards' (Wintour and Curtis, 2008: 15). Employers who have signed up so far include McDonalds, the budget airline Flybe and Network Rail. In the media, the proposed qualifications have been described as 'McQualifications' somewhat derisively, with a union representative voicing concern that 'A McQualification won't be a more rounded qualification to help a young person leave a dead-end job' (ibid). However, John Denham, Secretary of State for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), commented that 'it is right that we recognise and accredit employers that have shown a commitment to training and developing their staff' (QCA, 2008: 1).

A third issue that concerned us was that young people in JWT might be engaged in multiple and/or serial employment, whether full or part time, in the formal economy but also perhaps in the underground economy which is not openly recognised. As part of this strand, we were keen to find out what policy-makers, young people, Connexions and other stakeholders understand and define as training. Our concern was that young people accumulate a range of skills, often informally, which are of value to them personally, and can also have the potential to contribute to their employability, but which are not necessarily recognised as such.

2.2. Methods and data capture

Our research involved a sample of young people, aged between 16 and 21 years, although most were 17-18 years old, who were in JWT in the South West from the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Dorset and Wiltshire. The study was longitudinal and involved initial interviews with follow up interviews organised some months later. 182 interviews were conducted, 27 in person and 155 by telephone, plus a focus group with three young people. 114 young people were interviewed once, and of these 68 were interviewed again over the period of a year, with a destination record supplied for a further three. As we have already discussed, young people in JWT are not just a difficult group to categorise but also to reach. Although we have achieved a good sample size, doing so was very difficult.

The project involved 11 PAs at the outset, one of whom subsequently had to leave the project. Of the remaining 10, two were involved specifically in delivering Learning Agreements pilots, which were designed to increase 'training options available to 16-17 year olds in jobs with no accredited training' (DfES, 2006: 2). The PAs worked from

different Connexions offices in the South West region and their contribution has been invaluable. All have directly participated in the research process, which has sought to build capacity across the region and lead to discernible improvements in the advice and guidance service afforded to young people

The initial contacts for both telephone and face-to-face interviews were made by these Connexions PAs. It took a great deal of time to contact young people and then arrange dates and times for both telephone and face-to-face interviews. In many cases, they had changed phone numbers between the first and second interviews, or did not want to be called, despite having agreed to be interviewed.

The PAs conducted 100 first-round telephone interviews. However, as we shall discuss, the climate of uncertainty about the future of Connexions caused problems for the follow up telephone interviews. Not all PAs were able to take part and those who did faced many problems tracking the young people with the result that the sample was not complete and data came in gradually over a longer period than anticipated.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted by a university researcher. Securing face-to-face interviews was more problematic in the first round. Often, young people failed to turn up, despite the fact that they were to be offered a pecuniary reward for attending both interviews. However, of those 14, 13 returned for a second interview, which suggests, as we anticipated, that in-depth face-to-face contact has significant benefits.

2.2.1. Interviews

Telephone interviews:

These were conducted by Connexions PAs as described above. The telephone interviews were structured and lasted between 10-20 minutes.

1 st round interviews Oct 2006- Feb 2007	2 nd round interviews Aug 2007 – Nov 2007
9	8
10	3
11	0
6	2
6	0
12	11
9	6 (+ records for 3)
12	10
3	Left project Feb 07
10	6
12	9
100	55

Face-to-face interviews:

These were conducted by the university-based researcher, with seven young women and eight young men, from each of the six participating Connexions partnerships. The face-to-face interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and took place either in Connexions' offices, job centres, youth centres, or in young people's homes in a couple of cases, after full agreement from the interviewees concerned. One of the interviewees was unable to be contacted for a second round interview, otherwise all the young people were re-interviewed. The young people all have pseudonyms, chosen by themselves.

Interviewees (pseudonyms)	1 st round interviews:	2 nd round interviews:
Jo	17.11.06	25.10.07
George	05.12.06	01.10.07
Gary	14.02.07	14.11.07
Charmaine	11.02.07	26.10.07
Draco	19.02.07	03.10.07
Jane	02.03.07	01.11.07
Chantelle	09.03.07	24.10.07
John	13.03.07	24.10.07
Lee	11.04.07	-
Fred	23.04.07	20.11.07
Liz	23.04.07	20.11.07
Tamara	24.04.07	01.10.07
Rick	16.05.07	25.10.07
Dave	07.06.07	24.10.07

Focus Group

A small focus group was held at Connexions in March 2007. Subsequently two of the panel agreed to be interviewed face to face. We made extensive attempts to hold a subsequent focus group with a larger group of young people and to include peer-led discussions about our interim findings. Although such an opportunity was arranged as part of a day event organised by Connexions, this event had to be cancelled by Connexions as not enough young people agreed to participate. This helped to underline the problems faced in both advising and researching these young people.

2.2.2. Research capacity training:

We organised three 'training days' based at the University of Exeter for the PAs, during the course of the project, where they were involved in developing the interview specifications for the telephone interviews. We also used this opportunity to explore whether, and, if so, how the PAs' views of young people became transformed during the

course of the research - particularly the extent to which involvement in the research changed or refined attitudes. The consensus was that the PAs felt much better informed about this group of young people and much less likely to fall into negative stereotyping. The PAs were involved in validating the core team's interpretation of the data from the first round of interviews from both the telephone interviews and the in-depth interviews and small group session, and co-constructed the research questions for use in the second-round telephone interviews. The PAs were asked to keep journals where they reflected on what they had learned through their engagement in the research. Data extracts from the journals are included in this report.

2.2.3. Participative Research seminar

A participative research seminar was held to discuss our findings with key stakeholders in the region, including employers, government agencies and educational/training representatives. This was particularly useful since it provided the opportunity to triangulate the data (testing our findings against their views) and further ideas concerning the development of the second stage of the research.

In the participative seminar we started by brainstorming the images participants had of young people in JWT, as we had also done in capacity-building workshops with the PAs. For both groups, negative stereotypes such as '*drifting*' and '*desperate*' were characteristic. Having shared our findings from interviews with the young people themselves, we returned to these images at the end of the seminar. We found that the stakeholders had started to reconsider and, in many instances, reconstruct the pejorative views of the young people in JWT that they had previously accepted without question. This underlined the importance of conducting research on this issue.

2.2.4. Quantitative data surveys

In order to help us to contextualise our data, we analysed national and regional quantitative data relating to qualifications/training and employment destinations. The review was compiled with data drawn from the Office of National Statistics, (ONS, 2005a), Connexions (2005) and the Youth Cohort Study (ONS, 2005; 2006).

The ONS uses a representative sample of 0.2% of the population, and figures used are means of quarterly figures. Connexions data are taken from approximately 96% of the whole population of Year 11 leavers (age 16/17), from data gathered in the autumn of each year.

The National Employer Skills Survey [NESS] (BMG, 2006) is based on a structured sample of 74,835 employers with two or more employees in England across economic sectors.

We also accessed other data reproduced by the New Policy Institute (2007) on the Web. Finally we accessed regional data reproduced in the State of the South West 2007 (SWO, 2007) which draws upon the data-sets we have described.

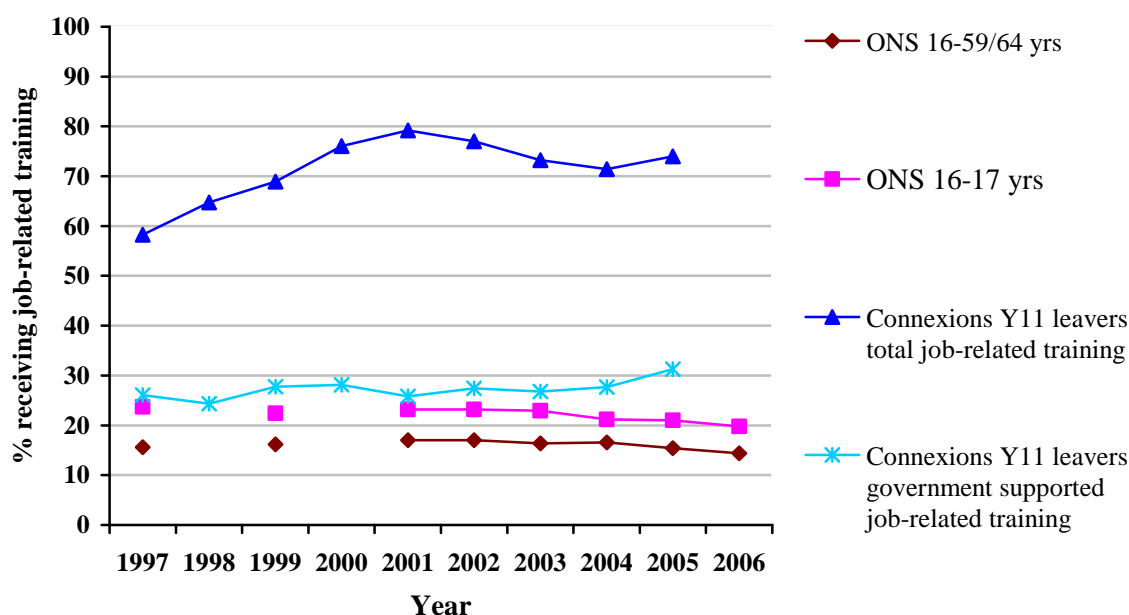
We have highlighted those areas where the data are unclear or where the data-sets are not consistent with one another.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Quantitative data analysis

The critical problem that we faced in making sense of quantitative data available on young people in JWT was that there is a lack of clarity over the various definitions that are used, for example whether the data-sets refer to full-time or part-time working or what ‘job-related training’ actually means. This problem of definition was evident when making the comparison between the Connexions data and that from the ONS Youth Cohort Studies.

Figure 1: % employees receiving job-related training by year



According to Connexions (2005), the total percentage of those employed nationally who were receiving job-related training rose between 1997 and 2002 to 80%, and has decreased slightly since that time. These levels are significantly higher than the ONS (2005a) data suggest. The Connexions data for those who are receiving government-supported job-related training broadly correspond to those from the ONS for 16-17 year olds.

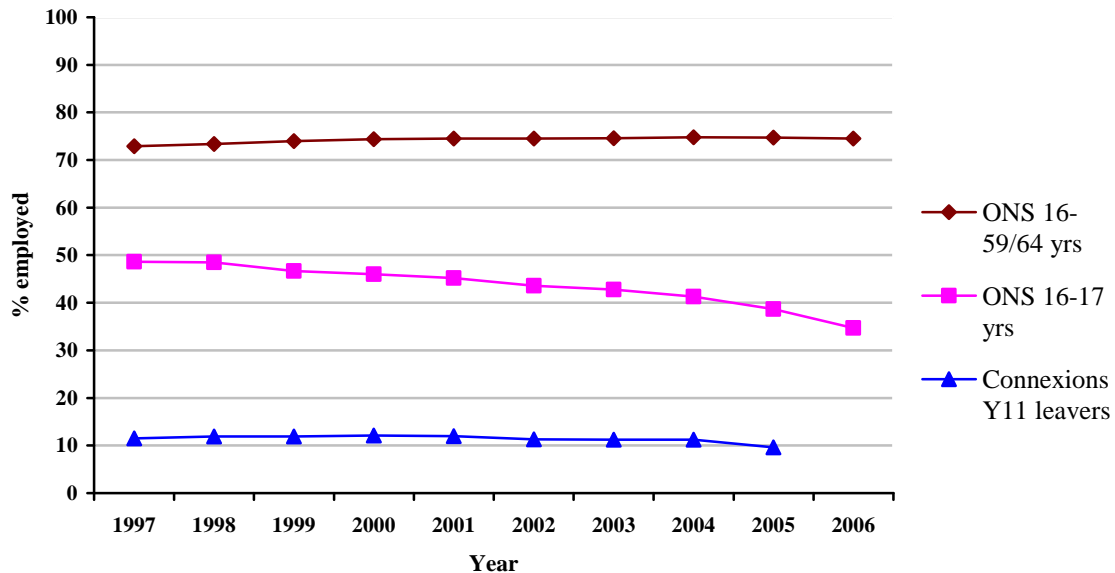
Drawing upon data from the Learning and Training at Work Survey, the DfES, (2006a) picture was different again. Employers reported that the following percentages of their employees were receiving off-the-job training in the following years:

Table 1: Off-the-Job training

	1999	2000	2001	2002
% receiving off-the-job training, as reported by employers	23%	27%	28%	31%

Clearly employers define training in a different way to the ONS, whose definition of training is different again to that used by the DfES. Such discrepancies are crucial given that policy is clearly being targeted on the basis of statistical data that is neither consistent nor complete.

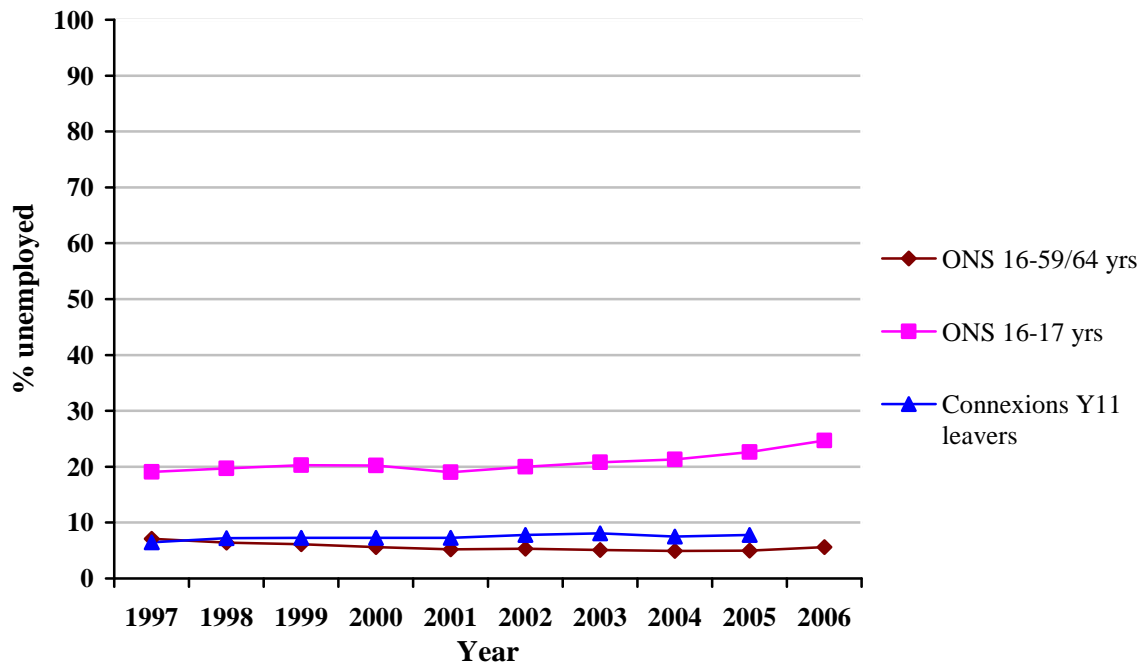
Figure 2: % employment by year



According to the ONS (2005a), the percentage employment in the working-age population as a whole has stayed relatively constant at around 73% to 74%, whereas the percentage employment of 16-17 year olds fell back from a peak of 50% to around 35% in 2006. Again there is a lack of clarity in this data as to whether they refer to full-time or part-time employment. Although the indications are that they include both, this is not made explicit.

The Connexions data (2005) refer to individuals in full-time employment, and do not take account of part-time employment, or those on full-time government-funded training. The Connexions data indicate that around 10% of Year 11 leavers are in full-time employment, broadly similar to the figure in 1997.

Figure 3: % unemployment by year



The ONS data (2005a) suggest that unemployment of 16 and 17 year olds has risen from under 20% to around 25% of the cohort. This is different to the Connexions data (Connexions, 2005) which indicates that unemployment remains at about 8-10% for this group. These latter figures are much closer to the ONS data for the working population as a whole.

The Government has focused much of its attention on the young people who are in the NEET category and those who are in JWT who are perceived to move into and out of the NEET category. The DfES (2002) calculates NEET figures by subtracting the number of young people in education and training from the total cohort. They then use the Labour Force Survey to estimate what proportion of the remainder are not in employment. Their figures are similar to the national figures from Connexions on Year 11 leavers who were not settled in full-time education, employment or training which corresponds to those shown above and those in Figure 9.

Table 2: % NEET by age in 2004 and 2005

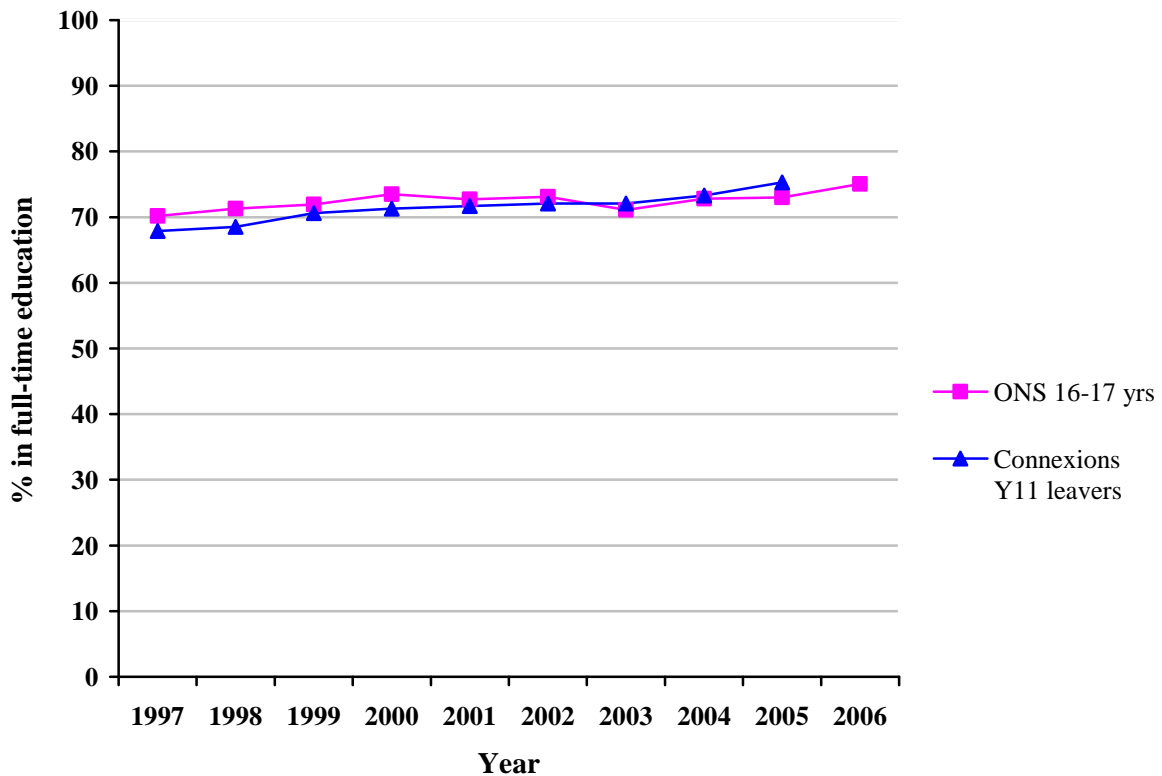
	2004			2005		
	% <i>NEETs</i>	<i>No.</i> <i>NEETs</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>Population</i>	% <i>NEETs</i>	<i>No.</i> <i>NEETs</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>Population</i>
16 year olds	8%	30,160	377,000	8%	31,520	394,000
17 year olds	9%	24,750	275,000	11%	36,410	331,000
18 year olds	13%	32,760	252,000	14%	39,060	279,000
16-18 year olds	10%	90,400	904,000	11%	110,440	1,004,000

Percentages rounded by the DfES.

The proportion of 16-18 year olds in the NEET category has remained remarkably stable at about 10% (200,000-300,000) of the total population of young people at any one time in England, Wales and Scotland. Young people in the South West region have consistently benefited from one of the lower regional rates. The most recent data (New Policy Institute, 2007) indicate that the South West region has the lowest rate of NEETs of all twelve regions of the UK with a rate of 8% (see also Figure 9). This compares with the highest rate of 13% in the North East of England.

The figures from ONS (2005a) and Connexions (2005) for 16/17 year olds in full-time education (Figure 4) are broadly in accord with one another, with the numbers in full-time education creeping up from a base of around 70% participation to around 75% in a nine year period between 1997 and 2006.

Figure 4: % in FT Education by year



One of the issues highlighted by the DfES (2006a) concerns employees who have received training from their employers in the four weeks prior to data collection, apart from those on government-supported work-based learning (Figure 5). The DfES accepts that these data are compiled from a variety of sources. The pattern across the age groups is remarkably similar with the trend across all the groups falling marginally from a very low starting base of less than 4% in the case of 16 year olds and 8% in the case of 18 year olds.

Figure 5: % 16-18 year olds receiving employer funded training by year

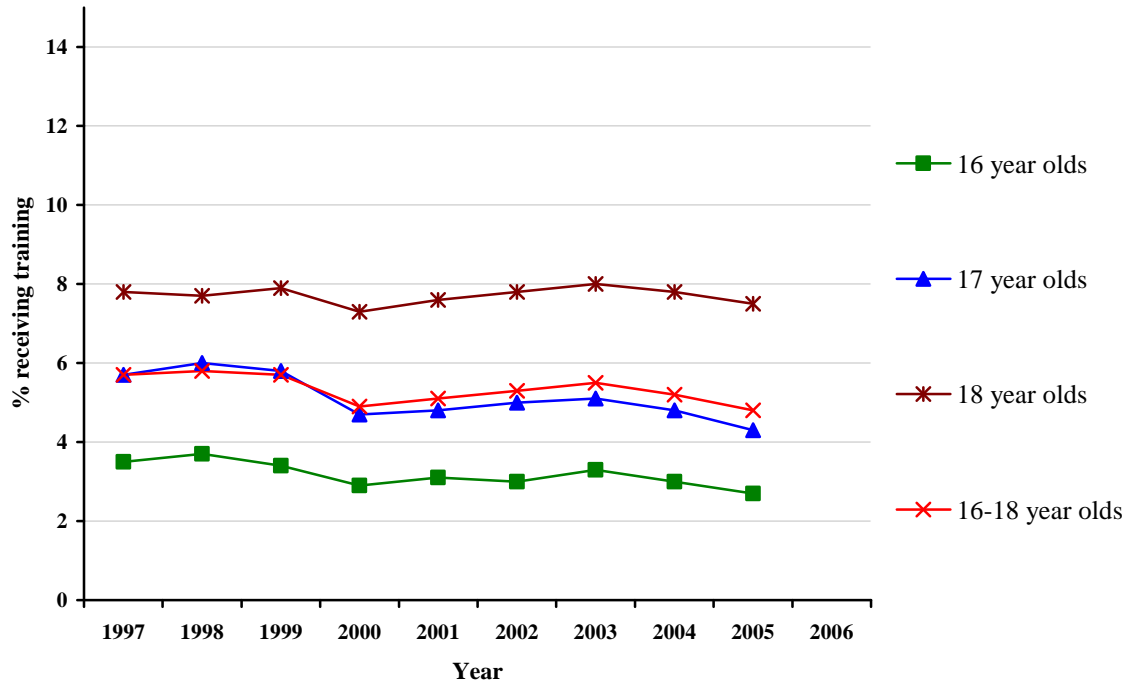
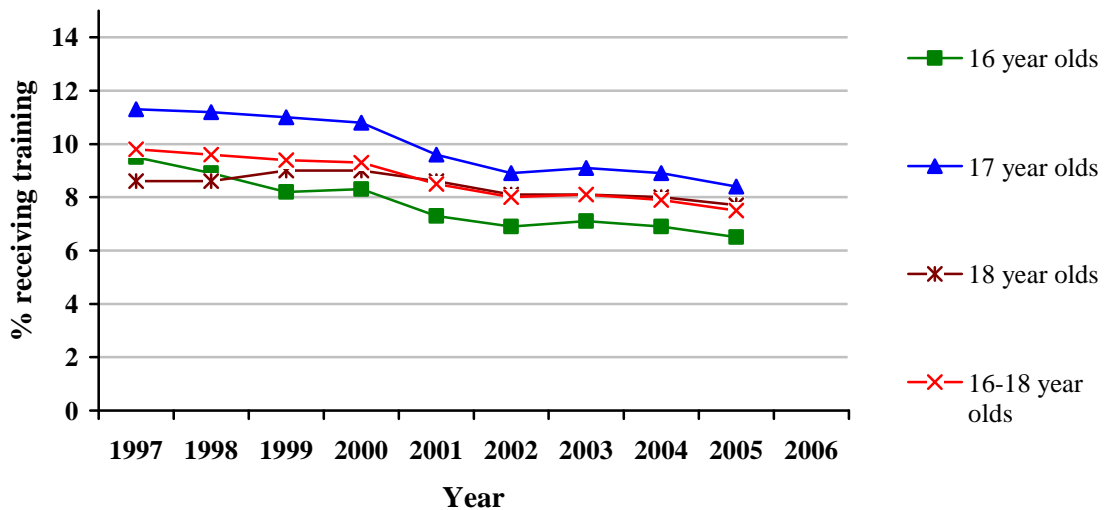


Figure 6 (DfES, 2006a) shows that there has been a decline in young people on government-supported work-based learning, which comprised Advanced Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment (E2E) and NVQ learning.

Figure 6: % 16-18 year olds receiving government-supported work-based learning by year



The South West region is home to five million people with in excess of 80% of the population economically active. In 2005, 575,000 working age residents were registered as inactive at that time (19.4% of the working age population compared to the English average of 20.6%) (SWO, 2007: 62).

There are some significant differences between the South West region and other regions of England. Whilst there are fewer individuals from ethnic minorities, those who live in the region are more likely to be in work than those in other parts of the country. Less than 4% of non-white UK Nationals are unemployed in the region as compared with around 10% in England (SWO, 2007: 72). This is confirmed by the relatively small number of inner-city areas in the region where unemployment rates are highest and is supported by the fact that net non-white migration into the region is low. Notwithstanding this, the data indicate an increase in migration of white part-time and full-time workers into the region from Eastern Europe which has depressed regional unemployment (SWO, 2007).

Figure 7 describes the regional picture (Connexions, 2005). It shows that the SW region ranked fourth out of the nine regions in England, just above the national average in 2004 and 2005 for Year 11 leavers in full-time education.

Figure 7: % Yr 11 leavers in full-time education in 2004 and 2005, by region

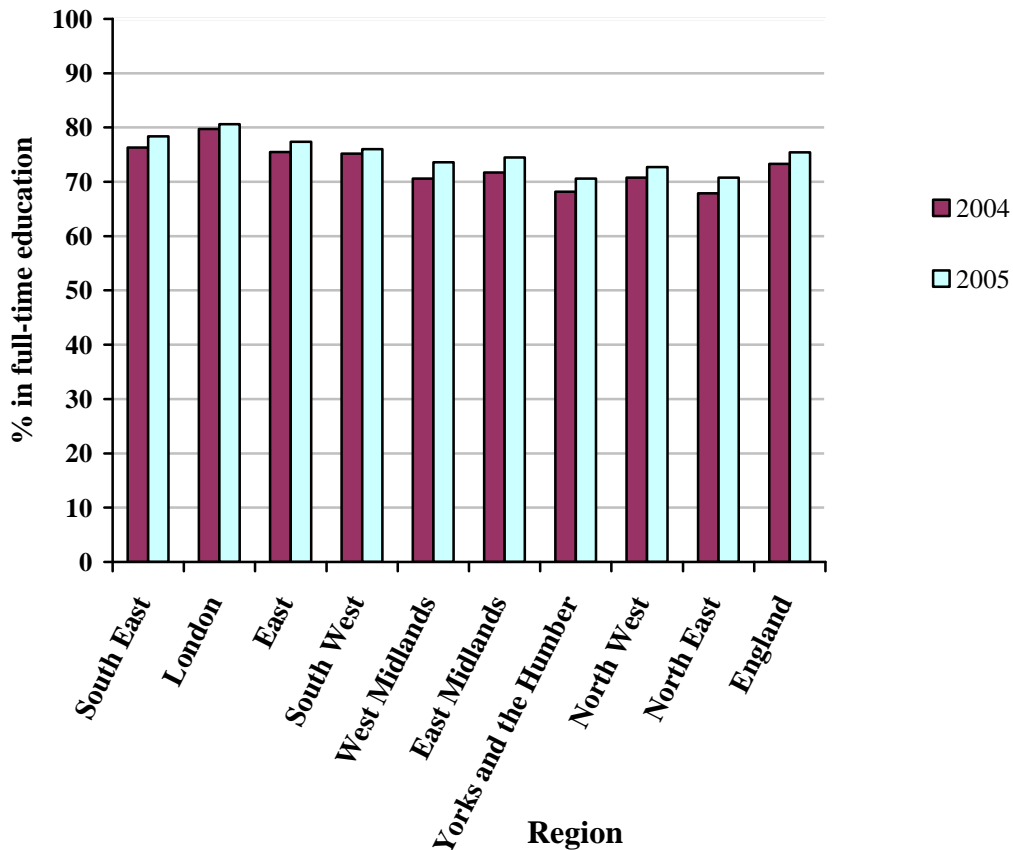


Figure 8 (Connexions, 2005) indicates that the South West region ranks third out of the nine regions in terms of the proportions of Year 11 leavers finding full-time employment.

Figure 8: % Yr 11 leavers in full-time employment in 2004 and 2005, by region

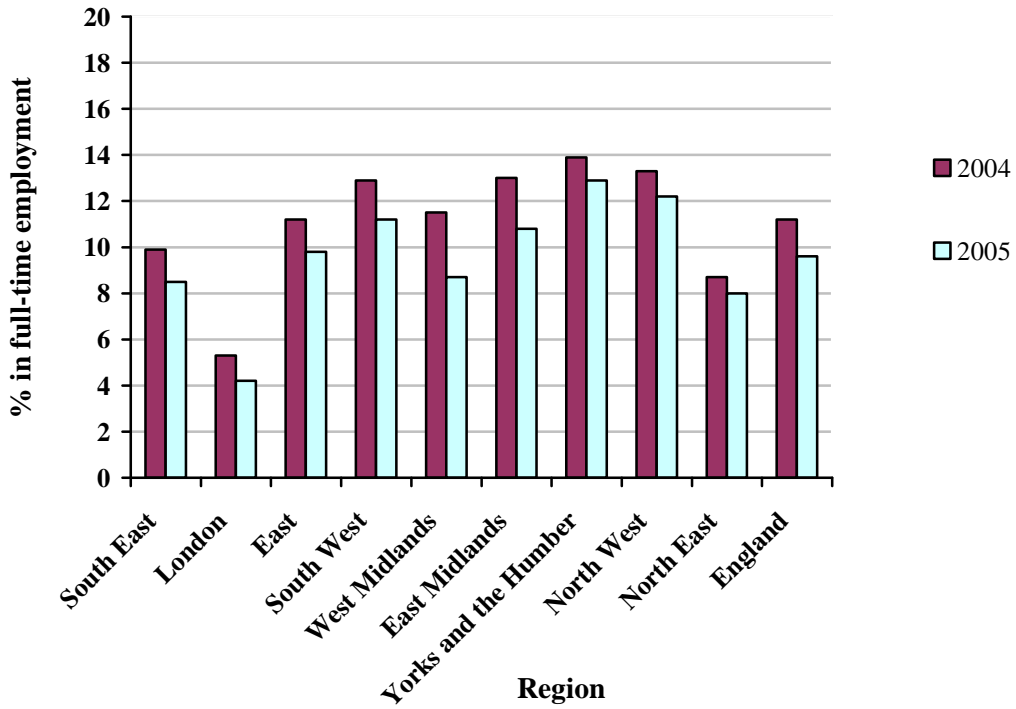
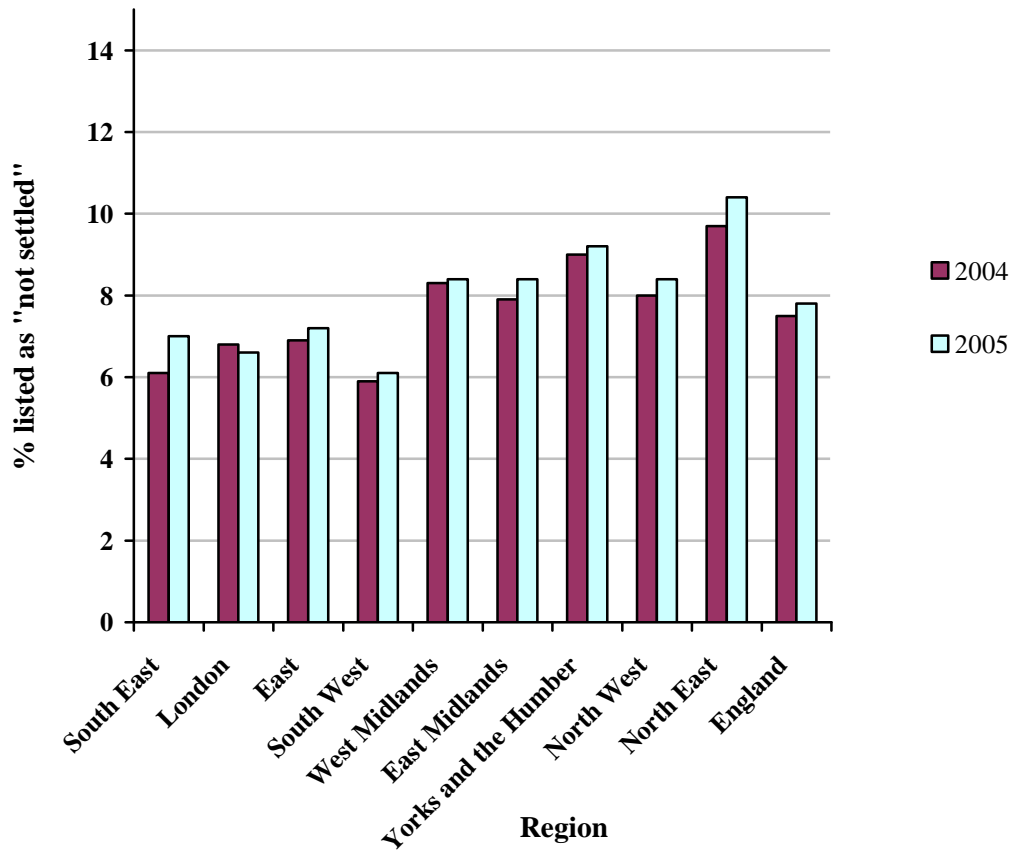


Figure 9 (Connexions, 2005) suggests that 6% of young people in the South West region are not settled in full time activity such as education, employment or training. These figures are lower than the 8% of young people in NEET identified in Table 2. This serves to emphasise the lack of consistency within the different data-sets. However it also confirms that the South West region is one of the regions least affected by youth unemployment per se, although it says nothing about the status or stability of the jobs involved.

Figure 9: % Yr 11 leavers listed as ‘not settled in a full-time activity’ by Connexions in 2004 and 2005, by region



GST = Government Supported Training.

Figure 10 (Connexions, 2005) however indicates that in excess of 30% of Year 11 leavers in the South West who are in employment, receive no training. This is one of the lowest rates in the country, with only young people in London in a less advantageous position. Regional NESS data (BMG, 2006: 22-29) points to the relatively small average size of workplaces (around 11 employees). Sub-regional employment patterns, such as the significance of tourism in the south of the region and the relatively larger financial services sector in the east of the region, are important factors in determining relative access to training.

Figure 10: % types of training of Yr 11 leavers in full-time employment in 2005, by region

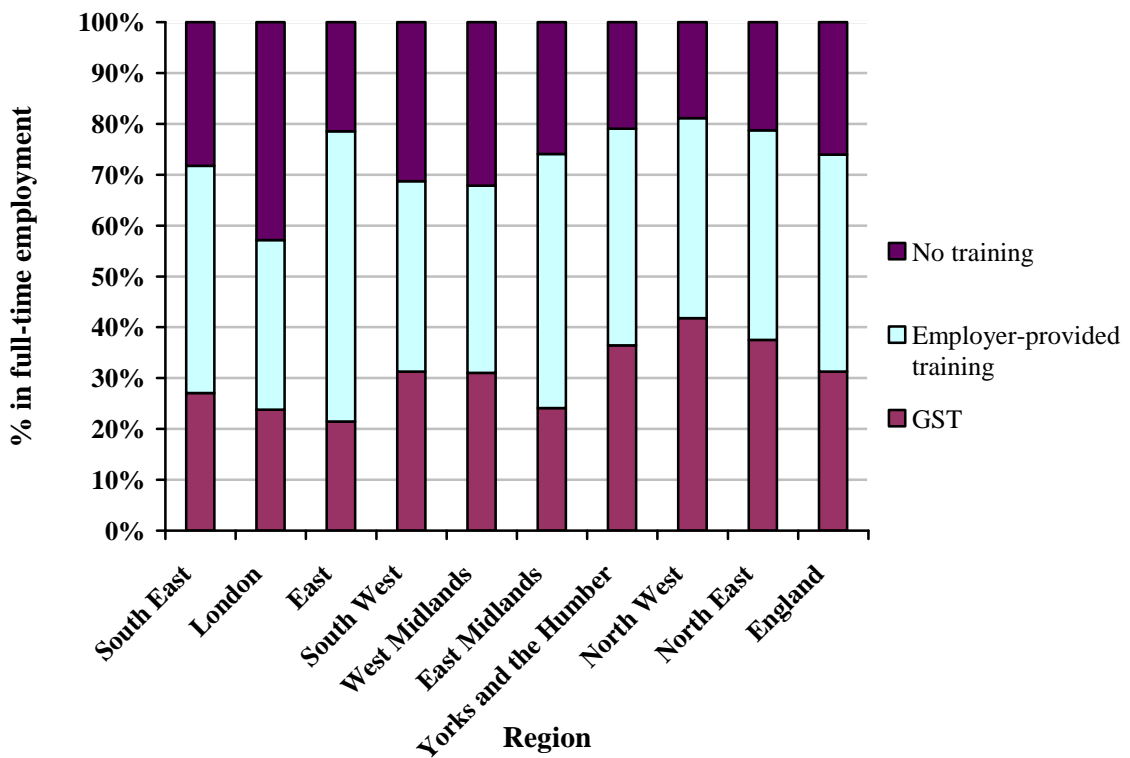
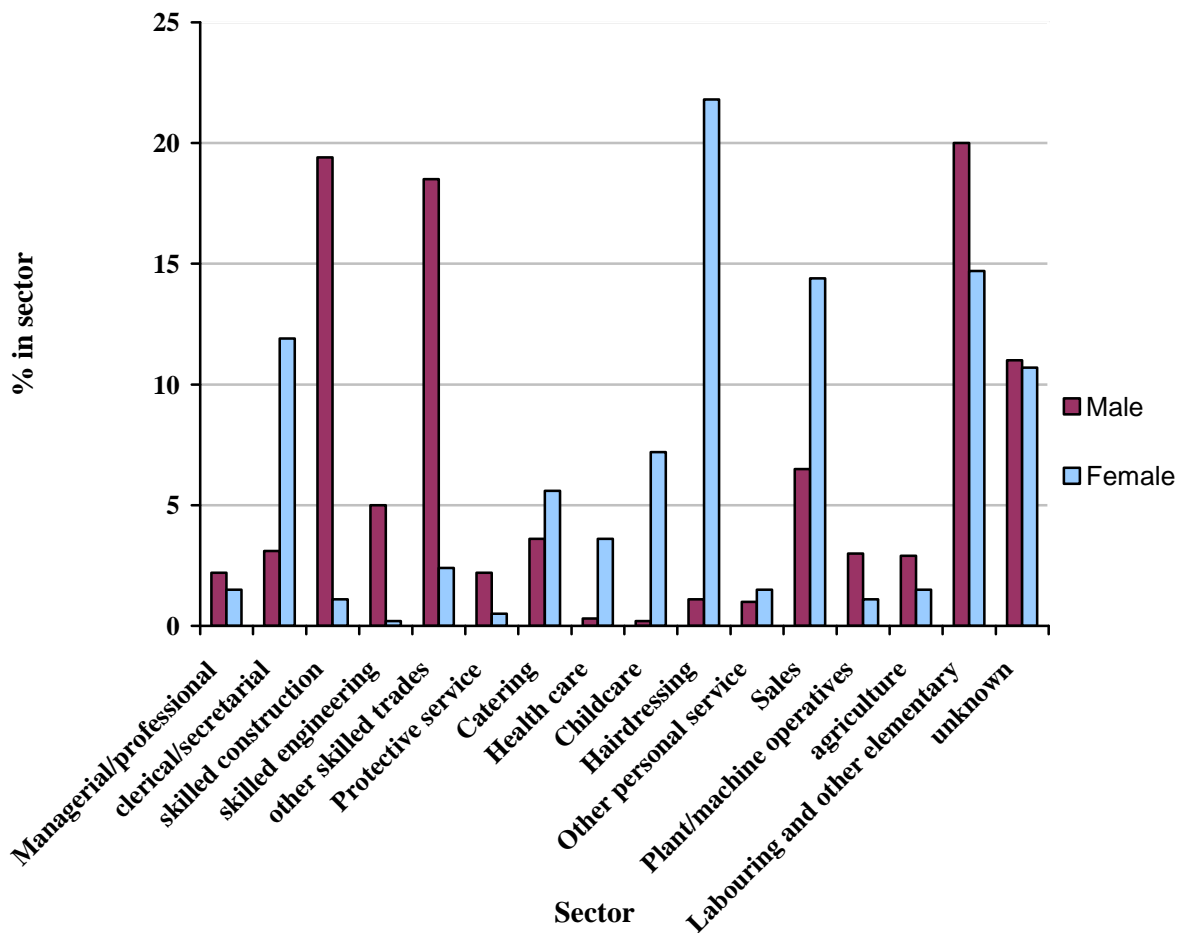


Figure 11 describes the national picture with regard to the gender breakdown by sector. (Connexions, 2005) confirms the preponderance of employment for male school leavers in skilled trades and construction, and labouring. Female school leavers continue to be employed in clerical and secretarial work, in childcare, hairdressing and sales.

Regional ONS data (SWO, 2007) indicate that a higher proportion of residents in the South West are employed on a part-time basis. Female workers in the South West are four times more likely than males to be employed on a part-time basis.

Figure 11: % of full-time employed Yr 11 leavers across industry sectors, 2004



3.2. Overview of quantitative data trends

One of our most significant findings was that the various agencies that compile the statistical data do so on the basis of very different criteria.

There is not yet a national database which tracks all young people as they move through and beyond school. The databases that are used in different Connexions regions are not consistent with one another. This raises an important issue of reliability and suggests that some action needs to be taken to ensure that the data-sets are consistent with one another. This will lead to better and more secure market intelligence which is an important pre-requisite for ‘good’ policy.

Whilst there are some significant differences across the nine English regions and the three regions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, many of the more significant differences are sub-regional. So, for example, the problems facing young people in Cornwall are very different from those in Gloucestershire and Bournemouth. All these areas fall within the South West region.

Although the South West appears one of the more ‘effective’ regions in terms of providing employment to young people, the data also show that much of this employment is not the kind that provides training, particularly accredited training. Although employers in the South West region expressed some dissatisfaction with young recruits, very few employers mentioned lack of literacy, numeracy or of generic skills, focusing instead on lack of motivation and work ethic (BMG, 2005: 67-68), which is hardly surprising given that the young people were often in their first period of sustained employment. Indeed, many of the same criticisms are often made of young graduates entering work for the first time.

Finally, the data also suggest that young women in the labour force continue to be employed in different sectors than their male counterparts and that systematic gender segregation persists. There is evidence also that they are more likely to be employed in part-time work, which has implications for training

3.3. Qualitative data analysis – introduction

The qualitative data were analysed thematically by the university researchers and discussed and refined in an iterative process involving the PAs and the participative seminar of stakeholders, as discussed earlier. By undertaking the research longitudinally, we were able to establish some interesting patterns in the data, although this is only for 68 of our full sample of 114.

19 (28%) young people changed jobs during the research period:

Around half of the young people who changed jobs during the course of the project moved in different directions. Sometimes these were marked, for example from casual pub work to the Armed Forces; from retail to a motor-vehicle apprenticeship. Other transitions were less marked, for example from self-employed labouring to employed plastering/labouring. Many had got current jobs through informal contacts, working ‘for my girlfriend’s dad’ or ‘a mate told me about it’. Only one specified the help of a Connexions Adviser in getting their current job.

12 (17%) young people had become NEET- not in education, employment or training - at the end of data collection:

Two respondents were pregnant, but hoping to return to work or re-training once their babies were born. Two respondents were recovering from long-term injuries (both work-sustained). Most were actively seeking work and/or receiving Job Seekers Allowance.

28 (40%) had taken up some form of training, 13 (18%) of these had moved out of the category of young person in JWT.
Apprenticeship: 4
Level 2 accredited training: 9
In-house training: 12
Other: 1 Territorial Army Basic training (part time) 1 BTEC National Certificate (self-funding part time at college) 1 Psychology Home Study course
20 (28%) would consider doing some form of training, if offered by their employer: eg NVQ Level 2/3: 3 (4%) would consider attending further education colleges for more training

Many respondents emphasised financial imperatives and whilst they recognised the value of training that would enhance their earning power in the long run, they preferred to be earning whilst training. Very few expressed interest in taking up training in FE, stressing the need to continue to earn money. Those who did had generally had Level 2 training at work. Two talked more vaguely of attending ‘night school’ sometime in the future; another possibly to go to college ‘to do something worthwhile, something that’s mine’. Very few had accessed their training via Connexions and none was really sure where to go for careers advice post 19.

Our research is useful in identifying these patterns, as discussed above, but where it has most value is in the rich qualitative data it has produced about these young people and how they understand their lives. There are many assumptions about such young people

from the outside but we are able to present a rare and nuanced picture drawn from their own accounts. The following key themes draw upon an analysis of both the telephone and face-to-face interview sweeps.

3.3.1. JWT as a problematic category

There are difficulties in being able to say something meaningful about young people in jobs without training because JWT itself is such a problematic category. As our quantitative data analysis has illustrated, there is a lack of coherent data about young people in JWT and they tend to become invisible (see also Yates and Payne, 2006). JWT is ambiguous because ‘there is still no common bond that links this cohort of young people together’ (PA journal). It can include highly privileged young people saving for international travel and those who are generally taking a break from study with an aim to return. For example, in the ongoing study by Huddleston and Maguire (2008), the majority of their sample of 36 young people in JWT fell into this category. Whilst there is clearly value in an overview picture of this sort, such young people are not the most vulnerable, nor (we would argue) the most important to understand. Since we wanted to study those ‘at the bottom of the pile’, we successfully factored the ‘on a break’ group out of our sample by aiming to include only those who had already been seen by Connexions for a year after leaving school. This has left us with a sample who are generally less qualified than those in the Huddleston and Maguire study and often from families with fewer resources and less financial security.

As our findings indicate, being in a job without training is not a discrete or fixed category. Many of the young people in our study moved in and out of JWT over time: the group included some who were often NEET and only intermittently in work and some who had built up a strong work profile and were about to undertake Level 3 training. As one PA reflected in her journal: ‘It’s interesting to see how fluid the JWT population is’. For some young people in our study, taking a job without training was merely contingent, their choices were limited and they took what was available:

How do you feel about your job?
Nothing in particular it’s just a job.
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?’
Haven’t a clue. (Ben)

For others it was a strategic stepping stone to a perceived future career:

How do you feel about your job?
It’s what I’ve always wanted to do.
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
I think I would like to be an RSPA inspector but I have to be 21. (Helen)

As we shall discuss further, the category JWT also depends on how ‘training’ itself is being defined. As we can see from the analysis of patterns, 40% of those we re-

interviewed were doing some form of training, but only 18% were doing the kind of training that is deemed to take them out of the problem category of JWT. Many young people in our study felt they were learning useful and pleasurable skills whilst working, even when the learning process was not formalised or accredited as ‘training’: ‘I’m not the dumb labourer, I’m a hands on learner’ (Gary). Conversely, in their experience, some accredited courses provided by training providers have no real skills element and are felt to be worthless:

I was doing the Customer Care thing one day a month [via Learning Agreement]. It was not like kosher it was like the whole place was set up for people who couldn’t find jobs or had made themselves jobs, all the people who worked there were the sort of people who did. (Liz)

They make distinctions between learning something they find valuable and needed for the job they are doing and training for the sake of training, which they see as questionable:

I’m doing the Horticulture course at Bicton, now. Ten weeks a year of training on block release.

Would it be possible for you to do further training at FE college?

No because the training that I’m getting now is exactly what I need at work.

(Gary)

What jobs without training signify in the lives of young people is also a problematic issue. Whilst being in JWT is seen negatively by policy-makers, for young people themselves, such jobs can be a lifeline, providing an upward trajectory. What others disparage as dead-end jobs can be a route out of a dead-end existence shaped by drug addiction, depression and poverty.

Don’t ever think you are stuck in a dead end because you can just pull yourself up. It’s like people like on a world basis you could easily get onto heroin or something and think you are in a dead-end world but all they have to do is bring themselves up and see a psychiatric help and get themselves up and get a job. (Charmaine)

However, Charmaine’s example also demonstrates the limits of tying debates on JWT to any rhetoric of work ethic or self-help. Even her personal sparkiness cannot negate the poverty and inequality which have shaped her life so far: ‘I’m only young but I’ve seen a lot of things’. Born to 14 year old parents, she has been repeatedly thrown out of home and has mostly lived on her own in homeless accommodation since adolescence. It is very difficult for her to sustain an interest in and focus on the kinds of jobs that are available to her and to keep her distance from the serious drug-taking that is going on all around her. Interviews show her moving rapidly in and out of low-skilled, low-paying jobs and starting to get involved in the drug scene. We cannot expect jobs, either with training or without, to be the sole solution to such social exclusion. Only a socially contextualised picture of JWT is useful and this is the focus of our next section.

3.3.2. Local contexts

The invisibility of young people in JWT in the South West reflects their marginal position within national debates - as provincial, rural and often sidelined. It is essential to acknowledge the power of locality: the lifecourses of the young people were strongly shaped by local contexts and traditions in the South West. The vast majority did not live in large urban conurbations or the inner city but in small and medium-sized towns and in largely rural environments. As the quantitative data show, there are jobs available to them, but few 'good' ones. In accordance with the patterns of employment we traced in the quantitative data, much of their work was located in the retail and service sector or in work that is not generally associated with a high degree of skill and characterised by 'long hours and rubbish pay' (Chantelle). Their opportunities and choices were very different from those living in large metropolitan areas and essentially much more limited. Carl, for example, had had to spend some time in London in order to develop the work history he needed to be able to get the job he wanted back in Swindon.

They faced very obvious material constraints. First, they experienced restrictions in terms of the job market. Ranges of employment were limited and often seasonal and lacking job security, particularly in the seaside areas:

Oh yes a lot of tourists come down here, but it's not very busy the rest of the time,...they always try to get some extra staff then they're dismissed as soon as summer's over. (Jo)

They (the building work agency) said they doesn't want to keep me 'cos I was the last one on wasn't I? (Dave)

Secondly, even getting to and from these jobs was not an easy matter. Public transport services were inadequate and consequently mobility and the capacity to take up employment or training were inhibited:

I had to take two buses to get there. (Tamara)

I've got to figure out a way how to get there by 8.30 am tomorrow and there's no trains or buses that go directly there. (Liz)

Housing is another problem they face where, as young local people, they have essentially been forced out of the market by very high prices, limited housing stock and second home ownership. The motivation of linking employment and training to goals of being independent and owning their own home was not very apparent. Other constraints were related to lack of confidence or willingness to take risks and these too were related to the spaces they occupied and their networks of family and friends. Our findings confirm those of Green and White (2007) that young people's work opportunities and their attitudes to them are shaped by their social networks and attachments. Some of the young people we interviewed did not have the confidence or wherewithal to look for work outside of a prescribed area. This was partially because they lacked social and support

networks that would allow them to move out of their immediate comfort zone, but also because their educational and life experiences had taught them that they were to expect little and be content with what they had. Young people had strongly developed senses of what areas were 'safe' for them, sometimes based on physical fears and sometimes on less tangible anxieties:

Everyone on that road is related and it's like a drugs den, oh it's horrible.
(Liz)

There's B-----, that's down the valley, but I don't go down there.' (Tamara)

As comments from our participative research seminar confirmed, there is a vulnerability amongst young people, who quite often feel insecure within their own communities.

An interesting question is how far use of the internet will be able to shift parochial patterns. Several interviewees claimed to have met partners from other regions and countries on the internet. George was moving to Scotland to join his partner to live and work there and Draco was planning to visit his new girlfriend's family in Morocco. However, thinking global is not enough without the resources to support change. More common stories were dreams of travel which never quite came true or using computers to retreat into the home.

However, staying local was not always a negative factor. Rural pursuits such as animal husbandry, for example in Gloucestershire and Devon, and activities popular in the region, including the Army Cadets, were important in shaping their activities, their work patterns and even their personal behaviour:

I kept myself to myself...I had to walk away from trouble because I've got a shotgun licence and I don't want to lose it. (John)

It's a brilliant place to live [Weymouth]... Oh absolutely gorgeous, we've got all the bays and the scenery. (Rick)

Many of those who expressed satisfaction in their work had found a harmony between themselves and the local environment. In responding to young people in the South West, it is crucial to understand them as contextualised and socialised, with both the advantages and problems that belong to the region. However, their relative opportunities to benefit are structurally constrained, as we shall now discuss.

3.3.3. Constraints of class, race and gender

Young people's ability to act is invariably constrained by their class, gender and race positions. Almost all of the young people in our sample were white and would be deemed working-class, using their parents' occupations as an indicator. Young people in the middle classes are likely to be able to rationalise their actions in terms of anticipated and

planned futures – for example one year working overseas followed by three years at university or college. Du Bois-Reymond (1998) has claimed that that such ‘choice biographies’ are the privilege of a well-educated, largely graduate elite. Such a trajectory was not available to these young people in JWT. Here, the young people remain in a transitional state in which their futures are likely to be more tentative and speculative (Ball *et al*, 1999). Many of their jobs existed to service middle class people, and to shore up the types of leisure activities enjoyed by those coming into the South West from other areas.

Most of the young people in our study had not had a successful experience at school and left with qualifications that were far below government targets of five A*-C GCSEs. The class stratification of education and the impacts of parental choice in creating hierarchies, particularly in secondary education, have been well documented. Most were from families where the opportunity to move and follow good or well resourced schools or pay for private education was not an option. Their accounts of secondary education were of large impersonal schools where bullying was rife and where they were quickly labelled as low achieving and in need of advice and guidance, with several participants referring to problems related to dyslexia and learning difficulties. Given national figures which demonstrate, for example, how few schoolchildren eligible for school meals stay on to do A-levels (Curtis, 2008), the impact of class on channelling these young people into JWT is indisputable. Their route out of education and into low-paid work or unemployment was almost inexorable. However, as we shall discuss, their ability to resist or subvert this powerful process was remarkable.

The significance of ‘whiteness’ and the recognition that it itself is a raced category is increasingly acknowledged in the literature on young people (see e.g. Quinn *et al*, 2006). One of its effects is to create an unquestioning sense of being the norm, which can create insularity. This is particularly true in areas like the South West, where, as the quantitative data show, numbers of minority ethnic people are very low. Whilst we do not have evidence of active racism against our one minority ethnic participant, living in such a dominantly white environment will inevitably have some impact on them. For the rest of the young people in our study, although their whiteness conveys certain privileges, their class potentially positions them in the category ‘white trash’. In their accounts, anxieties about respectability shape the sorts of jobs they want or feel able to get:

It’s just not something I want to do no more [I want to] go up a bit more than Sainsbury’s ... I want to get into something where I can wear suits and that ... I want to become either a secretary or a receptionist. (Chantelle)

Ethnic tensions did play a part in their lives. There was a perception amongst some of the young people that the new ‘white immigration’ from former Eastern bloc countries was affecting their employment opportunities:

It’s a bit crap in Launceston. There are about a thousand Polish people taking all the construction jobs and if you haven’t got any qualifications you struggle. I should live in the city. (Simon)

There are patterns of structured gender differences amongst the young people, even though many themselves claimed not to make these distinctions. During a small focus group discussion in March 2007, Dick suggested that their age group was 'more tolerant'. Unfortunately, these dispositions were not matched by opportunities. There was evidence of young women seeking to break out of traditional roles, such as Liz who wanted to be a mechanic or another young woman who was a tree surgeon. However, it was much more common to find young women as shop assistants and clerical workers ('managers prefer women' as one male participant noted), and young men as labourers ('my boss is happy with me because I'm a strong lad'), mirroring the overall national patterns revealed in the quantitative data. Although evidence of caring responsibilities was not strong in our sample overall, one young woman revealed how she helped her mother to care for her disabled father and brother and arranged her work life around these commitments.

For those such as Liz who wanted to break the mould, the journey was quite a difficult one. Having been inspired by the fact that an award for apprentice of the year had been won by a female mechanic, Liz set her heart on a career as a motor mechanic. However, she was being channelled into retail by Connexions. As she said: 'I don't make decisions about where I'm working and when'. Some seven months later, when Liz was re-interviewed, she was not exactly working as a car mechanic but was employed, with an apprenticeship (block release), in the parts department of a car dealership. Her account demonstrates that she is the exception that proves the rule about the persistent gender stratification of apprenticeships.

It's good. It's going okay. I am having the mick taken out of me by a lot of the men ... There are two girls up in accounts but ... I am the only one [doing an apprenticeship]. There were two other girls up there [on block release] one's a mechanic and the other one's a parts girl ... And there's probably four or five hundred boys. (Liz)

She also shows how homophobia against a gay male colleague at work creates a pecking order, with her at the bottom:

They just call him handbag and stuff like that. So I think maybe because I am the only one that is smaller than him I sort of get the come back. (Liz)

Despite legislation and a supposedly more tolerant and equal working environment, old prejudices and normalised inequalities were very much in evidence. The young people in our study cannot be seen as free agents totally able to shape their futures by motivation or good intentions. There were powerful structural forces at play and these had not generally worked to the advantages of our cohort in their lives so far. However, they made efforts to resist being fixed by their histories, as we shall discuss.

3.3.4. Fragmented identities

So how did the young people see themselves and how did they understand their lives? There has been an increasing emphasis on issues of identity and individuation in contemporary society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The idea that we are all engaged in making sense of our lives through reflective narratives of the self (Giddens, 1991) is both widely influential and strongly contested. It has been argued that this is a luxury most open to the middle class with most to gain from the process of individuation (Ribbens-McCarthy et al, 2001); that it does not reflect the realities of provincial living and that trauma and alienation make it impossible for many people to create such narratives. The young people in our research are very interesting in this regard. Many seemed unable and unwilling to give any coherent narrative of themselves and their lives. Their accounts shift spatially and temporally, making them very difficult to locate:

I lived in Swindon till I was 15 and then I moved away on my own ... down to Bournemouth and I lived with my girlfriend.

Did you go to school there?

No I went to work in a warehouse and got a supervisor's job there.

What, when you were 15?

I got it when I was 16.

So did you stay on at your secondary school in Swindon to take your GCSEs or not?

I did GCSEs there. I was back and forth when I was in Bournemouth. (George)

They are vague about their job histories:

How many jobs have you had since you left school?

Between 8 and 10. (Nathalie)

And mystify their qualifications:

What subjects did you take?

GCSE Rural Science, Financial Maths and Managing Money. (Harry)

What GCSE's did you do?

English I got 2 Es –no that's Science I got 2 Es. I got English an E. Maths I did terrible. I got a D in Theatre Graphics and Design. Used to do Cooking but didn't actually take that but I could have done.

So in total how many did you get then?

That's a tough question. I wouldn't know. (George)

What were your best subjects?

Dunno. (Lee)

As we can see in the narratives above, the lines between fantasy and fact are kept blurred, or crossed and re-crossed with the young people not prepared, or perhaps unable to

commit themselves to any line or course of action. (Ball, et al 1999) suggest many young people conjure an ‘imagined future’ that bears little or no relation to the reality of their lives. For the young people in our study, the *present* itself was imaginary. Little wonder, therefore, that formal transition points such as leaving school or interviews for jobs are slipped over and have little meaning. Unlike those young people in the study by Huddleston and Maguire (2008), who apparently mostly came from homes which were stable and financially secure, there was much instability and insecurity in the lives of many of our participants:

A lot of people struggle ... A few people I've met say they've broken up with their families, they've hated their life and they've tried to do stupid things ... I don't know why they do it but they've cut themselves. (George)

The sheer refusal to make a linear and coherent narrative is particularly marked in young people: this is not peculiar to the young people in the JWT cohort (see Lawy, 2002a; 2006), but it is exacerbated by their negative social positioning. Our explanation for this is not that young people in JWT have some individual pathology, but that no socially validated narrative exists which will allow them to make their case. Moreover whilst we recognise that society sees the problem as an issue of risk (Yates and Payne 2006), the young people themselves do not necessarily view their lives in the same way (Lawy, 2002b). In a society where the onus is on gaining school level qualifications, continuing in education, getting a respectable job with training, or somehow circumventing the system and gaining celebrity, those who do not do any of these things are losers, and no-one wants to hear their story. Being vague on the details enables the young people to slip some of these constraints and evade being fixed.

Consequently there is a real clash of realities between the young people themselves and those who are trying to help them. Our research seems to suggest that it is not helpful to try to impose a fixed story on their lives or constantly try to rework a past that has not matched the accepted patterns of success. Instead, it is important to understand how they imagine and live their lives here and now.

3.3.5. Imagination and risk

Young people in JWT are commonly perceived as lacking in any of the skills and attributes necessary to make a mark in their worlds. This was not the picture that was presented to us. What we saw were young people who operated strategically, certainly in terms of disclosure, and made decisions that had an impact upon their own lives and those around them. As we have discussed, they were quite playful in the way they presented themselves, almost teasing the listener with oblique and fragmented accounts. Nevertheless we were able to build a picture of complex lives which did not simply revolve around their work. As one member of our participative seminar put it: ‘they work to live not live to work’. It should not be forgotten that these are very young people. Rather than focus on JWT itself, it is more helpful to consider where it fits into their imaginary landscape of desire, risk and play.

There was a sense of playfulness and deadpan humour in their responses, as well as evasions and refusals. Some of the interviews take on a surreal quality, such as this exchange with Charmaine about working with her mother as a chambermaid:

I got sacked...I couldn't make beds.

Were there nice people there?

A bit bitchy people.

And were they all just seasonal workers?

No they were old workers.

Oh who come there all the time?

They come at lunch and they speak to my mum.

This playful quality was very marked throughout the interviews and rather than ignore or dismiss it, we feel it is more productive to acknowledge and work with it. Despite the ways these young people are constantly positioned as problems and failures, they have ways in which they take back control and play with even the most difficult aspects of their lives.

Sometimes, however, there is pathos attached to their aspirations and imaginations. Liz's father died while she was at school and she had been surviving on a succession of part-time and unskilled jobs since leaving school whilst her mother worked in a care home for the elderly. She had wanted to become a vet. However after she realised that she would not get the GCSE grades she changed her aspirations. Under different circumstances, Liz's imagined future (Ball et al, 1999) might not have been unrealistic; indeed she was determined and, as we show, she eventually secured a position in an environment that few women achieve.

Willingness to be imaginative and take risks marked some young people as more likely to be successful. Jo, who unexpectedly went to work in Greece for several months over the summer instead of visiting relatives in Canada as she had hoped, had some hair-raising experiences and came back a very much more confident young woman. The risks she took in going to Greece paid off. She recalled it was a 'fantastic' experience despite the long hours, very poor pay and abrupt termination of her contract. Her decision to go was both adventurous and practical:

Yeah just kind of grab the bull by the horns and just went for it. I thought well if I am going to be travelling you know why spend so much money on why not go somewhere for a longer amount of time, work earn my money then I can go on from there. (Jo)

Conversely, John, despite much support from his PA, won't take risks, and constructs the story of his ideal life and job (gamekeeper) as something that slips away from him because of other forces at work, beyond his control.

One of the issues that formed some of the deep background to our discussions with the young people was the issue of drugs and the drug culture and its impact on them, their communities and their friends. Where the young people addressed these issues, they usually did so – hardly surprisingly – in a way that disconnected them from the actions, although there were some who alluded to surviving financially through small-scale drug dealing or to taking soft drugs. Drugs were interwoven in the lives of the young people and seemed to signify loss of control and making the wrong move:

I've been doing bad things ... like I got in with the wrong crowd and I've been drinking drugs and I'm addicted to shoplifting. (Charmaine)

I've taken a wrong turn I can't get back. (Young man involved in drug dealing)

However, these young people have resisted drug culture sufficiently to avoid criminalisation: even Charmaine claims not to have a criminal record. They are navigating the risk of drug addiction quite successfully, it seems, and for some it exists as an imagined life they consciously repudiate and resist:

Exmouth is full of it like cocaine and stuff.

So it's easy to get into that?

Yes you just hear about it all the time.

What would stop you from going down that route do you think?

I've got a lot of friends who've gone that way, just to see them now and think 'Oh God' disgusting. They're just, and money they get goes straightaway on drugs. (Liz)

Rather than suggesting that young people are somehow victims, this shows that the young people made pragmatic decisions about their own activities and about what they were prepared to disclose to others. Having said this, we do not want to ignore the dangers associated with the drugs culture and the very real issues and dilemmas that young people face. Our point is that a simple 'good/bad' typology is an oversimplification of the complex situations which the young people in our sample were generally able to manage and negotiate. This pragmatic streak is perhaps what keeps these young people from becoming absolutely NEET and helps them to stay within the JWT category.

3.3.6. Survivors not losers

Young people in JWT have tended to be portrayed as 'dead-end kids', simultaneously street wise and victimised. In the capacity building sessions at the start of the research even the Connexions PAs described them as 'drifting' but also 'trapped'. We were able to trace such polarities in the way that the young people presented themselves and in their accounts of themselves. For example, they detailed how they responded to threats and slights in their localities and had the kind of street knowledge needed to survive: 'Someone I know nicked my bike, but he didn't know me at the time and he didn't know

who I knew' (John). At the same time they frequently gave detailed and convincing accounts of bullying at school and its impacts on their educational progression:

When I got to secondary school it all went downhill... it was just bullying and the teachers just chose to ignore us. The way I saw it in my experience is that they knew about the problem, they knew what was going on, they'd seen it happen and they did nothing about it. (Jo)

The difference is that official accounts, and media portrayals essentialise these factors: young people are presented as dangerous victims, because of their fundamental lack of the qualities necessary to be successful citizens. Despair at society's inability to control gang culture amongst young people has been apparent in the tone of the media coverage of the recent spate of teenage murders across the UK. Yet, whilst young people in JWT are perceived in the media as being to a degree marginalised from the rest of society, our interviews with young people in the SW region suggest that they do not regard themselves in that way. Rather they were largely positive about their experiences, pleased to be in work rather than sitting around at home not working, and/or engaging in illegal and criminal activities. They were survivors and not losers and it is those survival skills which need to be picked up and worked with.

Gail, for example, was interviewed by telephone aged 18 years, two years after leaving school and again six months later. Upon leaving school, she did not immediately move into work, rather she attended the FE college to study for an Intermediate GNVQ in IT and to retake some GCSEs. Gail was living in her family home and seemed adept at moving from one job to another with periods of unemployment interspaced between each job. Her experiences of work included shop work and office work. Certainly Gail did not seem to conform to the stereotype of a feckless and witless young woman, rather she seemed a happy and normal young woman, perfectly at ease with herself, her friends and with her circumstances. Asked to describe herself she said:

Outgoing, open, honest – I say what's on my mind – opinionated, friendly, hyper. I also have good practical skills and I am a fast learner. Although I like to work on cars in my spare time, this is just a hobby and I wouldn't want it as a job. (Gail)

Although many of the young people in our sample were subject to problems that lay beyond their control, they presented themselves as making choices about their lives. Such agency has been described as 'temporally embedded and bounded, influenced in the chances of the present moment by past experiences and the sense of future possibilities' (Evans *et al*, 2001: 25). Whilst issues of class, gender and race are important in structuring the life chances, the young people resisted victim status and differentiated themselves from those whom they saw as beyond hope.

Jane, for example, lived with her family and an older sister (by four years) on a tenant farm in Devon. Jane's world was far removed from that which is envisioned by politicians and policy-makers in London. Hers was not a world of high skill, high

technology but one where the aim is to work close to home and close to the land. When asked about how her GCSEs went she said:

Not fantastic ... I don't know, they kept on and on and harping at me. I didn't want to be at school. I wanted to be at home outside. (Jane)

At school Jane was diagnosed with dyslexia. This did not pose a problem for her, although it did for her teachers. For many young people in a similar position to Jane, the opportunity to leave school represents an opportunity to leave behind the preconceptions and baggage that had accompanied their 'failure' in school. They relish the opportunity to start afresh in an environment where they find formal qualifications are less important than the personal qualities that they bring with them. Gail's aspirations for the future are typical. As she said:

I would like to find my dream job ... working in a friendly company in an important position, such as a manager. I want to be useful to the company. (Gail)

As maturity and opportunities grow so can pragmatism and flexibility For Jo, a few months working in a Greek hotel had been an enlightening experience:

It kind of opened my eyes, because I thought it would be all plain sailing, it would be fine and it would be just like here. How wrong could I be? (Jo)

Having returned to her old supermarket job in her home town, she felt confident about changing direction:

It's not something that I am going to want to do in ten years' time you know. At the moment for me it's just something to tide me over until I get something else. (Jo)

One of the dangers of the characterisation of young people in JWT that we are presenting is that they are somehow content with working in low-skilled and low-paying jobs. This raises the question whether we are justifying the dichotomy between those young people who continue in the education/training system and those who move into low status JWT. Certainly this is not our intended purpose, rather our aim is to show that the picture is more nuanced than we might expect. We found the young people in our study building a store of life and work experiences and developing as independent young adults who were surviving difficult circumstances with good humour. Their demeanour, which can seem withdrawn and monosyllabic in many cases, hides a great deal of fortitude. As this PA reflected in her journal:

I have learned of the apparent importance of young people getting work, work without training doesn't necessarily mean a dead end for these young people, it appears to be a springboard...those whom I interviewed appeared to have a

happier more independent view on life and all had aspirations. This is not always the case for NEET clients.

3.3.7. Young people's needs and formal education/training pathways

Our research findings indicate that there is often a mismatch between young people's needs and formal education and training. The formal education system emphasises linear pathways and progression and enforces them quite rigidly, backed up by career advice (see Quinn et al, 2005). Segregation starts way before 14 and the young people in our study have mainly been sorted into a struggling secondary school then steered into the vocational route at GCSE level. The current expectation that forms of education and training must continue post 16 was seen as a trap by many of our interviewees. They were highly resistant to returning to formal education:

What about any more training?

Pass. (Jane)

Only 4% of those we re-interviewed wanted to go to FE college for training. College was often perceived as a frustrating hamster wheel, where their friends had become stuck in a pointless cycle of unwanted training:

...so they've all finished their courses and realised they don't want to do it so they are doing more courses. (Fred)

...some of them went to college then dropped out, then tried a different one then dropped out again ... pointless isn't it. (Jane)

Whilst education was associated with pleasure at primary level, it had subsequently become punishment and control:

I never used to enjoy school. I used to get picked on all the time ... I used to go and see a counsellor at school but I just didn't have ... I couldn't talk to anyone. (George)

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) emphasises formal routes to employment which are strongly linked to accredited qualifications; young people are told that without the right qualifications they will never get a good job. In reality this becomes quite counterintuitive, since so many of our participants got their jobs, including jobs they liked, with prospects, through informal contacts of families and friends: 'My mum is my boss at Asda' (Vicky), 'I stepped into my cousin's shoes' (Joe). Despite being cast as not knowing things, they often have very effective knowledge of local opportunities and are proactive in securing them. However, the problem here is that if they rely on what they know already they are likely to stay in circumscribed situations - especially as for many of them their world is quite narrow, as we have discussed.

Many of the young people did recognise that if they wanted to progress or make radical changes, some form of training would be necessary, but it needed to be the right training at the optimum moment: 'I'll get there when I want to do it and it's just I haven't wanted to do it yet' (Jo). The problem is not accredited qualifications themselves; it is no more helpful to bar these young people from them than it is to force them to do them - but rather training which is unresponsive, inflexible and out of touch with reality:

Well at college I prefer it to be more practical and like learning about what you are actually doing but then they are like oh make a poster about health and safety and it's like I don't want to do that. (Fred)

For many of the young people there was a sense that just as they felt ready for training it became an avenue that seemed closed off to them: 'I realise now I'd like to be an engineer, but I'm too old to do it now.' The focus on young people 14-19 rather than upon training and education as a continuing lifelong activity with the concomitant support and other systems was an issue that many of the young people commented upon or at least alluded to.

3.3.8. A job without training, not a job without learning

Some of the young people in JWT saw their jobs as boring, frustrating and pointless. However, as the members of the participatory seminar noted, they did not necessarily accept this and would try to move on to something more rewarding. Having accredited training was rarely the factor that made for this sense of satisfaction and reward. As one of the PAs noted in her reflective diary:

...each young person is different, even though they are seen to be in a job with no training - he is happy with this and content with his life. This will make me more aware ... so not to get caught up in the 'thought' that they should move on to get a better job.

Again, a dominant discourse concerning young people in JWT is that they have 'potential' but are wasting it through lack of 'motivation'. However, potential tends to be defined as the ability to study and train and the waste is the perverse refusal to take up this opportunity. Turning to the young people themselves, we find a rather different story. Although to some extent they did position themselves as 'the thick bunch' (John), who were channelled towards Connexions advice from school onwards, they were also able to recount many forms of informal ability and interests. They had skills with computing or mechanics, developed at home rather than school, skills looking after animals, creative skills, including Mel's documentary filmmaking which she was attempting to turn into a career. Making a bridge between these informal interests and work and training opportunities could be achieved. The outstanding example was Rick who had turned an amateur interest in magic into what seemed to be a very promising career as a magician. His interviews are suffused with enthusiasm for his work in a holiday camp and for life in general:

I like to do something different... I'm more of a people person really, I like to get there and chat to people, there's so many interesting people out there you know... I'm really lucky because I've got a residency in a nightclub in Weymouth and I'm working for them every Saturday evening and that's brilliant as well. (Rick)

However it must be said that Rick is not typical of our sample. His family appeared to have more middle class dispositions and resources. They certainly had more mobility, as his parents had moved from Oxford to Weymouth to do something completely different in life and he himself had developed the ability 'to adapt to the surroundings'. Others were less fortunate or less motivated and their informal skills and enthusiasms were not fostered into employment.

However, these skills and enthusiasms had legitimacy for them even without formal accreditation or even being part of paid employment. They made a dichotomy between practical and book learning:

I've got a practical mind... give me a book to learn, I can't learn it, tell me to do something, if I do it wrong, I know what I've done wrong straightaway, I can fix it like that. (John)

Things at home that came to pieces, I could put them back together again. (Draco)

Many of the young people stressed that they did not want to learn in a classroom:

I like to learn at work without teachers. (Andrew)

What I've learnt, I've had to teach myself. (Rick)

They took pride in their work:

What do you do in a typical day?

Strimming, hedging and planting people's gardens, not big work... It's good I enjoy it. It makes me feel proud when I stand back and look at the finished job. (Gary)

I love my job it's really varied and I like being outside, it's practical and every day is different. I like the animals too. (Ben)

And they felt they could learn far more that was of use through work activities:

They didn't want no trainees. You just go in, you train as you do the job. I thought that sounded good. I like doing that sort of work because studying I

never got the hang of, cause textbooks and that, it doesn't really register in my brain that much. (George)

As we have seen, 40% of our re-interviewed sample were doing training, but since only accredited job-related training is seen to count, 22% of this becomes invisible. The young people themselves make different distinctions. They value good work-related training more than a certificate. They even compared the quality of learning they experienced with those learning formally and felt far better 'educated' via the workplace than their peers in college. For example, Ritchie, a pig farmer, being trained on the job to be a manager asserted:

... have thought about it (college), but when I look after the kids from college on day release I realise I'm in the best position as I'm learning more and more each day and I don't need a classroom to learn it.

There was a sense, too, that being in the workplace rather than back in the classroom had made them more mature, 'because we've been out in the real world, we know more about what's going on' (Dick).

Of course, these observations need not be taken strictly at face value, they may be justifications and obfuscations, but they certainly formed a consistent thread in the ways that the young people presented their relation to work. Concomitantly their ideas about training were extremely hazy and even distorted. For example, John claimed to want to go to Agricultural College to study game-keeping but felt it was impossible because it would cost '£10,000 a year on travel and tweed suits'. However, in some respects the young people were well informed about the training scene: very many spoke of wanting full apprenticeships, but of the very limited chances of gaining them and also of the likelihood that training does not lead to a job. Draco appeared to have spent two years in FE college training to be a mechanic only to end up valeting cars in one of only two small garages in his area, where further training was never discussed only 'the events of the day.'

Although the young people seemed aware that training was generally considered desirable, they knew from experience that small employers did not necessarily encourage it and for many of them small firms characterised employment in the South West, as the quantitative data suggest. Overall, their stance was evasive and their priorities more immediate:

For me work means I can live here and I can save my money. I can get to Canada. So to me, work is brilliant. (Jo)

As we have discussed they resisted being fixed, sometimes in very explicit ways:

I want to pass on thoughts of college, I just want to float. (Abigail)

Similarly the emphasis on formal pathways into work was not relevant to these young people. They also might be engaged in multiple informal and transitory jobs:

I get a bit of money here and there gardening, they come down to my house tell me to start work tomorrow morning 8 o'clock sharp. (John)

I've had loads of jobs, I've done tele-canvassing, door canvassing, waitressing, paper rounds, working in retail shops ... I worked in tele-sales for one day and left ... then I worked in another tele-sales for five days. (Charmaine)

The skills debate is important here. Almost all of the young people that we interviewed recognised that the skills that they needed in their work roles were often not the hard 'how-to-do' skills associated with particular tasks but a skill set which was at least in part cultural and related to their particular situation. There was a recognition that in order to get on in their jobs they needed not only to impress their immediate line managers and supervisors, but to identify and develop a social, collaborative and flexible skill set.

Whilst we recognise the importance of functional (literacy, numeracy and IT) skills for effective working, the key issue is how young people develop the job-specific skills that they need and how they adapt to the working environment with their colleagues:

It makes you realise that GCSEs and stuff really don't affect what you do outside, workwise and dealing with real life situations, you realise there's a lot more stuff that's more important than grades. Getting a job really does depend on what sort of person you are and whether people can work with you. (Liz)

Training becomes a reality for these young people once it becomes essential to the skills they need for the job they want. Moreover a lot of the young people who were re-interviewed said they would take up accredited training if offered it by their employers. Our interviews with young people support evidence from a recent skills survey involving employers in the South West region:

What is apparent is that the major concerns [of employers] are not 'content based' in a way that the institutions responsible for foundation education would find it straightforward to tackle. Spontaneously, few employers, for example mentioned lack of literacy, numeracy, IT or 'generic' skills. Virtually no employers mentioned that their young applicants **lacked qualifications**. Rather they identified recruits' lack of motivation and work ethic (a cultural rather than educational failing) and lack of life and work experience (hardly surprising amongst young people entering their first job). (BMG, 2006 p. 67 original emphasis)

3.3.9. Readiness for Training

One of the assumptions of the prevailing discourse about training and work is that young people will have before them a trajectory or ladder of progression which they will traverse until they reach their goals. This is a simplistic view of the career trajectories of young people who sometimes but often do not move in this way through their careers (Lawy, 2003; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2007). What these studies show is that the nature and character of transition has changed over the last 30 years and that while there are some similarities in terms of the three trajectories (careerless, short-term careers and extended careers) identified by Ashton and Field (1976) many of the fundamental structural and cultural conditions have changed including young people's self image and their expectations and perceptions. All of the young people that we interviewed justified their actions as personal choices, when in fact much of their decision making was essentially prescribed by external factors, for example problems of schooling, of family or finance. Making use of a life course approach and typology developed by Giele and Elder (1998), Heath et al (2007) emphasise the complexity of these decision-making processes and their 'embeddedness in history, biography and structure' (p.12).

The importance of social networks cannot be underestimated. Despite the fact that the young people in our sample were locked into the JWT systems and structures with their Connexions PAs, as we have discussed, many of them secured employment through their own social organisations, families and communities. Gary was not untypical. He explained that he had been in the Special Needs cohort in school. He was initially involved in a work-placement programme whilst at school (two days per week) working at the same place as his uncle.

I trained at my uncle's garage ... He works for someone up there who used to like ... known him for years. (Gary)

He did not pursue that career but had gleaned from his experiences that he could make a career for himself through hard work and by using his contacts to secure opportunities. At this point he had just started to work as a gardener and was still considering his options.

I wouldn't mind trying window fitting. My brother [does that] ... And he works with my boss's brother. (Gary)

Gary did not move jobs, rather he chose to continue with that career path and in fact enrol on an NVQ level 2 programme with the support of his boss. At this point his horizons had shifted. He could see a future before him running a gardening business with trainees learning from him in the same way that he was learning. This was very different from his schooling which he had not enjoyed. But now he was older (aged 18 years) he could even see the great satisfaction he might derive from passing on his experience.

Talking to them and showing them. And make sure they do it as well with you standing there and telling them what to do. And then if they do it wrong then you get to talk to them rather than show them right, and they get it. (Gary)

An important yet unsurprising finding in our research is that there is no particular moment that can be identified where it is possible to say that at that moment young people are ready to embrace learning. This does not mean that they do not wish to learn at all; rather that they are unprepared and unwilling to subject themselves to the formalised learning that they associate with schooling.

Many young people who leave school at this stage just need to try out different opportunities before making a choice. As George said:

I love working in bars most, it's something probably I am better at than anything ... Well out of all the jobs I have been in the bar one is the one I've done best... I always used to dread working on a bar ... Well not on a bar but working with customers. Because the public being what they are, but working on a bar like how I was, and getting all the respect I was getting and all that. (George)

Yet there is an assumption that young people have a set of clear goals and aspirations. Our findings suggest rather the contrary, and confirm findings from the Equal Brighton and Hove – a city-wide initiative that supports adults into training and employment. The aim of the project is to work with people who have experienced difficulty in accessing routes to learning and work. (Equal, Brighton and Hove, 2008).

We found that even in the short space of time in which we were able to conduct our research, the life circumstances of many of the young people became transformed and that life commitments and experiences, sometimes in work but also outside, led some of them to begin to reappraise their options and aspirations. It was when they became oriented to the future and not the present that formal learning re-entered the picture. The problem was that post-19 guidance was no longer available, just at the point it might be more useful. Moreover, the emphasis on training 16-19 made them feel that they had missed the boat and were too old to become what they wanted. On the positive side, those who came back to formal learning often did so by finding something that they enjoyed or felt they could do well and then decided at that point to pursue studies. This suggests that creating links between informal learning and formal work and training opportunities is a key factor in supporting these young people.

3.3.10 Support Advice and Guidance

In terms of formal IAG, the opportunity afforded by Connexions appeared variable. Some viewed the service positively, others felt it was restrictive. For example, for some young people, Connexions had been their only valuable source of personal advice and guidance:

[The Connexions PA] basically has done a hell of a lot for me because he's helped me with all sorts... I deal with him all the time now because he knows all my background, he knows what I've done. (John)

Yeah me [Connexions PA] and her got on really well, we always have a laugh and that's good... it's a good service for young people. (Charmaine)

Rick, working as a self-employed magician, described how Connexions had not only been able to organise practical support, such as buying a suit for work and placing advertisements in the local press, but also helped him think strategically about his career direction:

Coming here helped me out a lot ... I was a little bit at a dead end, so I came here and they put me on the right tracks... [my PA] taught me to get over hurdles, look at other scenarios that are there which you can't always see. So I've gone through different routes around things. (Rick)

For others, Connexions was simply pushing a government agenda and failed to listen to the young people themselves.

If you tell them one thing about you, that's the only thing you're about, and then you have to do something in that area. (Liz)

Dick, who contributed to the small focus group that we held, was considered as potential university material by his Connexions PA, but had been working since he left school at 16. However, at 17 years old, he still felt that neither he nor Connexions had 'a clue about what I want to do.' He resented being pushed into a direction that he did not feel comfortable with by Connexions who were, he felt, 'constantly on my back.' This resentment at such a form of intrusion into his life and career choice may have been a factor in his subsequent refusals to show up at agreed follow-up interviews with the university researcher.

Clearly, young people at this stage in their lives are in need of information, advice and guidance. It is an immensely difficult task to construct and deliver IAG in a way that is going to help all young people, not just those in the JWT category, to engage with any future employment and training. The complexity of the task is going to be made more taxing with regard to forthcoming policy and practice changes. These include not just the Government plans to implement proposals to raise the participation age to 18 (DIUS, 2007) but also the imminent changes in delivery of the Connexions services across the English regions (from Spring 2008). In brief, the budget of approximately £500 million from the 47 Connexions partnerships in England will transfer to 150 Local Authorities, (CfL, 2007) who will be responsible for providing 'an integrated youth support service' (Watts, 2008: 8). Potentially, the provision of IAG will be delivered differently in each Local Authority. For example, existing Connexions services are absorbed within the Local Authorities or 'remunicipalised' (Watts and McGowan, 2007: 3); or they continue

to operate much as before on a ‘retention’ basis (*ibid*) but will have to compete for the contract; or they continue to offer IAG on a more universal basis but also operate within a multi-agency ‘locality team’ in order to target those deemed ‘hard to reach’. What should be emphasised is that the situation is both complex and changeable, and no one is quite sure what the final form of IAG provision will look like, or what role Connexions PAs will be asked to fulfil. (See also Bawden, 2007).

The Government acknowledges that good information, advice and guidance is vital and that this needs to be linked to the creation of a ‘universal careers service, working with Jobcentre Plus, ... to ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions, and to get the support they need’ (DIUS, 2007: 28). What remains to be seen is how 14-19 IAG can be integrated with the post-19 adult careers service.

In the light of all these changes, concerns about how and why young people in JWT are given both appropriate and consistent IAG are both timely and of great importance.

Notwithstanding all of these problems, the young people in our research valued personal relationships and mentor relationships in their working lives:

If I can't get on with the person I'm working for I won't stay in the job, simple as that. (John)

However, the need for some guidance and someone to turn to was a prominent refrain. Moreover, the need for someone who really listened rather than trying to impose their own agenda was stressed:

When I was at school part of my depression was I was attacked ... I met this woman who came out, this volunteer who was an old lady with hearing aids in both ears and she didn't listen to a word I'd said cause when I'd said something to her she'd try and change the subject and she just literally wouldn't listen and if I had something to say she'd interrupt and talk about what she wanted to talk about. (Jo)

Our findings show, unsurprisingly, that frontline Connexions staff succeed when they build ongoing relationships with young people, rather than going through the motions of providing advice. Holistic guidance which links work and learning to advice on social and personal problems has most chance of making a difference:

She is quite good with me she knows like my whole personality, she knows what makes me tick, what makes me sad, what makes me happy, so it's well fortunate to have her as a Connexions Adviser. (Charmaine)

Many of these young people resist all structures which remind them of their negative experiences at school. Careers advice needs to learn practices and informal approaches from the youth and voluntary sector. Young people do not suddenly become sorted once

they turn 19 and, in fact, our research strongly suggests that it is post 19 that they may become more receptive to returning to training. This is a key factor that must be addressed in ongoing developments, both nationally and in the South West.

4. REFLECTIONS

- Undertaking this research has been a difficult but ultimately rewarding process. In common with others working in the field, we have found it difficult to contact young people and to keep them involved in the research. Recruiting our sample and arranging interviews involved many phone calls, cancellations and long journeys across the South West. Although the help of Connexions was invaluable in identifying young people, getting access through formal gatekeepers, associated with the structures of schooling, inevitably made some participants more suspicious of the process.
- However, we are pleased with our sample. Our decision to factor out those ‘on a break’ means that we have a good sample of those who are most vulnerable and least advantaged. Although it is not ethnically diverse, this reflects the demographic of the areas involved (the ethnic diversity we had hoped to access in Bristol was not possible, as the PA in that area was unable to take part in the research). It is particularly encouraging that all of the face-to-face interviewees but one returned for a second interview some time later. Although hard to reach, by the second round, good relationships had been established. The longitudinal element was important as the researcher was seen to be taking an interest in them, not just looking for a quick fix
- Accessing our telephone sample via Connexions, incorporating this within the PAs’ existing work with young people and factoring out those on a ‘gap year’ break, has had distinct advantages for the research. We have been able to generate a sample which contains the less academically confident and probably more vulnerable young people.
- However, the impending changes to the Connexions service and the atmosphere of uncertainty as to what will happen to jobs, services and structures has proved problematic. Although PAs worked hard to gain an initial sample of young people for the first telephone interview, only half this number were accessed for the second round. Understandably it seemed difficult to give the research priority in the current climate, and commitment and support from management has been variable throughout the project. Moreover, Connexions staff have very heavy workloads and many work part time and some of the difficulties sustaining relationships with young people are endemic: ‘I found undertaking the second set of interviews much harder than the first; I have lost contact with some of the young people, others had changed jobs, some to ones that are different’ (PA journal). Therefore, although we have substantial numbers, some of the power of the longitudinal study has been lost.
- One of the aims of the project was research capacity building amongst Connexions staff. Training workshops held to facilitate this have seemed

beneficial and there has been positive feedback and reflection, particularly about learning more about the client group and about building research skills. As researchers, we have found the perspectives and local knowledge provided by the Connexions PAs to be very helpful. One outcome of the capacity building was that a team of PAs and a university researcher ran a seminar about the project at the regional South West LSRN conference in July 2007. This was very well received. One of our concerns is how this capacity and the knowledge and expertise of Connexions staff overall will be preserved in the new arrangements for advice and guidance services.

- The participative seminar of stakeholders to whom we presented our interim findings provided useful reflection and discussion and both endorsed and challenged our perspectives on young people in JWT. As a result of the seminar, we organised some peer led research to take place as part of a Connexions day. Sadly, as explained earlier, not enough young people agreed to participate, which underscores the difficulties of reaching these young people either as a Connexions adviser or a researcher.
- So far we have presented findings from our research at two international conferences and were asked to take part in a consultative seminar organised by the Nuffield/ Rathbone 14-19 Inquiry. We have also been invited to submit an article to a journal targeted at practitioners and academics in the post-compulsory sector. We intend to disseminate our findings as widely as possible across practitioner, policy and research domains.

5. CONCLUSIONS

One of the dangers of this research was of presenting young people as having little or no agency or control over their own destinies. While the evidence from our interviews leads us to reject such assertions, we have been careful not to romanticise the experiences of this group of young people, who have been targeted by the government as being ‘at risk’ or at least in need of help and support in their quest for ‘meaningful’ employment. The research suggests that a nuanced picture of the ‘problem’ of young people’s engagement in JWT provides a more appropriate response. This has served to highlight a set of issues that are commonly overlooked when the views and experiences of young people are discounted or where they are assumed to speak with one particular voice. One of the ‘key lessons’ from the Understanding Young people in Jobs Without Training report produced by the DfES (Anderson et al, 2006), was that the Connexions staff interviewed ‘stressed that they knew less about this group [JWT] than other groups of young people with whom they worked, especially those who moved from job to job.’(p.2). Our research has now added to the sum of knowledge about this group of young people.

Our conclusions fall under three broad headings. In the first section we address the *conceptual problems* that became evident during the course of the research. Secondly we focus upon *social and structural issues and constraints*. We end with some practical *recommendations* that were highlighted through our research. In formulating this final section, we have been conscious of the national picture but also of any specific differences or policy challenges relevant to the South West region.

5.1. Conceptual problems

- The category of ‘young person in a job without training’ is needlessly pejorative: these young people are being defined entirely in terms of what they ‘lack’ and thus the skills and knowledge they possess are overlooked. Our findings suggest that JWT need not be a deficit category and that positioning such young people as ‘dead-end kids in dead-end jobs’ does not do justice to their complex lives.
- JWT is a very fluid category. Over the period of our study, 28% of our re-interview group had moved to other jobs, 17% had become NEET and 18% had taken up accredited training.
- This category covers a diverse range of activities, from building a career to one-off day jobs. It is not the job without training that matters but the purpose it serves. Having this generic category is not particularly helpful in understanding the lives of young people.

- These young people see themselves as survivors not losers, and they differentiate themselves from those who seem beyond hope because they are involved in crime or drug use.
- These young people *are* receiving training. 40% of our re-interview group were now involved in training, which was mostly work-related and perceived as valuable, but only 18% of this was accredited.
- The emphasis on formal training and on bringing these young people back into the loop of schooling is misplaced. For the majority of the young people in our research, school was negative and they prefer to learn in other contexts such as work. Only 4% of our re-interview group would consider going to FE college, whilst 28% would take up accredited training in the workplace.
- Their life-paths are not neat trajectories and they actively resist being pinned down. Punishing them for not being linear, which the current highly structured and hierarchical educational system does, is anachronistic in this post-modern age, and also counterproductive.
- The skills that matter to them are those that enable them to do the jobs they want to do. They have a strong sense of what is legitimate learning and what is bogus. Many feel they are learning useful and credible skills in the workplace and much prefer this to accredited courses of dubious quality and relevance. Some of the skills that are seen as most valuable are soft interpersonal skills rather than hard mechanical ones.
- Many of the young people got their employment via informal contacts and social networks and not through formal agencies. They have good local knowledge and employ it to get jobs.
- They do have informal skills and interests and sometimes they are able to develop them into career paths, but mostly they do not have the confidence or encouragement to do this.
- They are often ready to take up training after a few years in employment, rather than immediately after school. The emphasis on 16-19 and the concentration of guidance at this time is far too narrow a window for them.
- We must be willing to have our assumptions about what is a worthwhile job and a worthwhile life course challenged if we wish to support these young people.

Our research shows that that the way young people in jobs without training are thought about and discussed needs to be reconceptualised, in order to take account of these very different meanings that attach to their lives.

5.2. Structural issues

- Although the positive elements in the lives of young people in JWT are often neglected, it is important to acknowledge the problems they face too. The transitional periods of liminality that these young people are experiencing can all too easily solidify into low waged and insecure futures.
- These young people are the products of a hierarchical and unequal education system and have had limited opportunities to gain good qualifications at school level.
- Our quantitative and qualitative data show that the young people in our study do have work opportunities, but they are mostly reluctant to leave their home area. The data also shows that in the South West, the jobs available to them are mainly low status with little job security.
- Both our quantitative and qualitative data shows the job market is highly gendered; it is possible to take up non-traditional roles, but very difficult.
- Problems such as lack of transport and housing difficulties restrict the ability of young people to take up the jobs they want.
- In some cases they face a range of personal problems related to poverty, family difficulties, accidents and ill-health which make sustaining a job very difficult.
- They are aware that they are positioned negatively in our society and mask and hide themselves when faced with those in authority.
- They value those who are prepared to take a genuine and holistic interest in them, but resist those who appear to see them as targets to be delivered.
- They do need support and guidance, even though providing it can be frustrating and difficult. They are confused as to where to get such guidance, particularly post 19.

Our research shows that the ‘problem’ of young people in jobs without training is not a problem of the young people themselves, but a problem of inequality. Only a restructuring of schooling, a major investment in local economies, adequate infrastructures of transport and housing and a shift in cultural narratives about what constitutes a successful and valid life will really improve opportunities for them.

5.3. Practical recommendations

Whilst we believe that both conceptual and structural changes are the key factors in supporting young people in jobs without training, we acknowledge that practical recommendations can make a difference.

- The systems and structures of support for young people in the post-16 sector should be rebadged as separate to those that pertain to young people in school, for example as ‘Teenstart.’
- These systems should be unified and follow the same protocols across different regions.
- There should be a multi-agency approach which combines advice on education and training with support on personal and social problems and which makes explicit links with leisure and informal learning opportunities.
- Opportunities for young people to sample different work experiences and the skills associated with them need to be made more accessible. These opportunities need to be resourced and funded in a way that does not further stigmatise them.
- The validity of good work-based learning should be endorsed and supported.
- There needs to be a recognition that the work and learning trajectories of young people do not follow linear patterns and that the systems of support advice and guidance need to be flexible and available at a point when they decide to lock into them.
- There should be an information campaign alerting young people over 19 to opportunities for training and for advice and guidance.
- The funding mechanisms and structures that operate through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to support young people in JWT should not penalise providers simply because there is not a measurable outcome.
- Funding mechanisms for young people in the Learning and Skills (further education) sector need to be structured so that young people can access education and training post age 19 and neither they nor the providers are financially disadvantaged.
- The broad remit of the PAs needs to be recognised with appropriate training to support the pastoral work they need to do with this client group.
- IAG specialist knowledge should be better resourced and supported from pre-14 onwards.

- CPD for PAs should include opportunities for reflection and sharing of knowledge with others, such as PAs from other areas, practitioners from related fields and researchers in post-compulsory education and training

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7. APPENDICES

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: Phase 1

Introductory statement:

‘This is a research project that is being done by the University of Exeter, to try to find out more about young people in work. They have asked us to help find young people to interview, and by talking to you and others like you, and understanding more about yourselves and your work, the eventual aim is to benefit young people like yourself in the future.

Everything you say to me is absolutely confidential and I will make sure that you are given a different name on the record of the interview. This will be sent directly to the university researchers, who will not know your real name.

I have a few questions to ask you about yourself, your interests and your job and I will make a note of what you say. If you want to receive a copy of this, I can send it on to you. We want to interview you again in about six months’ time but you have the option to withdraw from the project if you wish. Are you happy to continue with these interviews?’

Personal information/social life

1. Your name is:
2. How would you describe your ethnic group?
3. You are years old.
4. You were born in:
5. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
6. Do you have any children?
- 7: Where are you living now? (eg parents/friends/homeless/on your own):
8. What do you like doing with your friends? (eg what did you do last Friday evening?)

Telephone interview schedule: Phase 1 cont:

Education/work

1. When did you leave school?
2. Did you like/dislike it?
3. What subjects did you take (qualifications achieved)?
4. Have you ever attended an FE college? (whilst you were still at school or afterwards)?
5. In your area how do you find out about getting jobs?
6. What was your first job? How did you get the job you are doing now?
7. How long have you been doing this job?
8. What do you do in a typical day?
9. What do you like/dislike about it?
- 10: Are you getting any qualifications or training?
11. What job do you think you will be doing in six months' time?

THANKS AND END OF INTERVIEW

Reflective comments:

How did I feel about the interview today?
Would I do anything differently next time?
Did I learn anything new about young people in JWT?
How should this affect my practice as a PA?

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: Phase 2

My name is and I've called again to follow up the interview I did with you on and I said then that I'd be calling in a few months' time to see how you're getting on now.

Initial establishing questions:

To begin with, can I just check that your are , aged and still living at home/on your own/etc?

Jobs:

1. Are you still doing the same job?
2. Has the job changed at all since the last interview – if so in what way? (eg had any informal/formal training/promotion)

If job has changed:

1. What is the job (or jobs) that you are doing now?
2. How did you find it?
3. Why did you leave your previous job?

If not working:

1. What are you doing now? (eg looking for work/on benefits/return top education/family responsibilities etc)

Attitudes to job/reflection on work opportunities:

(if not working then following interview questions to be adapted, but still want to know about attitudes to work/life changes/range of informal skills etc).

1. What do you like about your present job?
2. Do you think where you live has influenced your choice of job? (eg are there opportunities for work/training/other progression routes near by)

Telephone interview schedule: phase 2 cont.

3. Do you think being male or female has affected your choice of job/training?
4. If your employer offered you NVQ training would you take it?
5. What do you think your boss thinks of you? How would s/he describe you?
6. Would it be possible for you to do further training, at FE college for example? What would stop you?
7. After you're 19, where would you go for career IAG?

Personal:

1. Any new interests or hobbies?
2. Same/different circle of friends?
3. How would you describe yourself (eg what are you good at, trying to get an idea of the range of informal skills they might have)?
3. What do you think you will be doing in six months' time? And in five years: what would you like to be doing?

THANKS AND END OF INTERVIEW

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE Phase 1

(semi-structured)

Introduction: explanation and purpose of interview/incentive /agreement of pseudonym.

Section A: About you and where you live:

(eg place and date of birth, current residence, how long/lived anywhere before, what area is like to live in – transport/jobs etc)

Section B: your family and your educational experiences:

(eg family situation, parents' jobs/role of family in helping to find job. Experiences of primary and secondary school. FE. Likes and dislikes.)
What did you want to be as a child, why not now?

Section C: you and your friends

(eg Social life: what do you like to do to relax/hobbies/interests? Jobs of friends/role of friends in helping find work.)

Section D: your experiences of work:

(eg holiday work/Saturday jobs. Current job/how achieved/how long been doing it/what it involves/likes and dislikes. Any training offered/what's it like/what have you learned/what would you like to learn/what would be the best way to do it (explore issues around certificated and non-certificated training)? Any knowledge of what training might mean for you? Role of Connexions/any other agencies/school/college. Whether links are made to build on informal learning and skills. What is the purpose of work/why do it?

Section E: transitions and expectations:

(eg where do you expect you will be in six months' time/why? What would you like to be in five years' time/why? What sort of person do you want to be and what part does work play in this?)

THANKS AND END OF INTERVIEW

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE Phase 2

(semi-structured)

Introduction (including consent forms/vouchers)

Section A: updates on interviewee's activities since previous interview, job/family, residence etc)

Section B: Changes in job

(eg more than one job, same job, promotion, what do you do in a typical day. Any gender issues.)

Section C: Training opportunities

(eg considered engagement with any forms of training/education. Been offered opportunities to do so by employers.)

Section D: Reflection on learning

(eg soft/hard skills since 1st interview, framed in terms of what has gone well/badly in your job and how did you deal with it? What would you do differently now?)

Section E: mentoring experiences

(eg both formal (Connexions) and informal)

Section F: your future

(eg where do you see yourself in five years' time – same question as before but has anything changed since then?)

THANKS AND END OF INTERVIEW

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